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The Works of

CHARLES PAUL DE KOCK

WITH A GENERAL INTRODUCTION BY

JULES CLARETIE

GUSTAVE

VOLUME II

TRANSLATED [illegible] BY

ANTHONY [illegible] MARTIN

M. MARTIN'S DONKEY

TRANSLATED [illegible] BY

EDITH MARY NURRIS

THE FREDERICK J. QUINBY COMPANY

[illegible]

When the animal got within two steps of him he was ex-
on the ground. (See

From an Original Drawing by Ernest Fuhr

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JULES CLARETIE

GUSTAVE

VOLUME II

Translated into English by

ARTHUR S. MARTIN

M. MARTIN'S DONKEY

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EDITH MARY NORRIS

THE FREDERICK J. QUINBY COMPANY

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CHAPTER I

Misapprehension. Suzon is Lost. Projects of Marriage

"Please, madame, for heaven's sake, save me; shelter me from the pursuit of all that riff-raff!" cried Gustave.

"But, really! madame — monsieur — I don't know what you are or where you may have come from!"

"I'm a madcap, madame; but that's all I am; and you may receive me into your house without any fear!"

"Good Lord! that voice! those features! yes, it is you. It's M. Nicholas Toupet, whom I met at the village wedding!"

"What, can this be Madame Henri, the pretty silk-mercer of the Rue aux Ours, who sat with me under the tree?"

"The very same, monsieur! What a singular meeting! But that poor little one! I must run quickly and tell her."

Madame Henri left Gustave in the shop and went up to the first floor, where she slept with the girl who had been left in her care. Suzon had been with Madame Henri only since the day before;

but two feeling hearts understood one another very quickly. Madame Henri was of an age and figure to inspire love, and so she ought to be indulgent towards the faults that that passion made others commit. These were not exactly Suzon's reflections, but after the departure of the colonel and the housekeeper she had looked at Madame Henri and then began to cry. The little silk-mercer had consoled her by begging her to tell her all about her troubles. Madame Henri's gentle tones carried confidence; when parted from a lover it is some happiness to talk about him, and so Suzon had naively related all her adventures.

Madame Henri had pitied Suzon, and then she had uttered a cry of surprise at the name of Nicholas Toupet, whom the little one did not want to marry.

"Why! I know that M. Nicholas; I met him at a wedding at La Villette."

"Really! Isn't he ugly, and awkward, and stupid?"

"On the contrary, he's a handsome fellow; he's amiable and witty, and he dances divinely."

"Nicholas Toupet! he could never keep step; he's heavy, and scarcely knows how to put one foot before the other."

"You're joking; he was the best dancer at the wedding."

"He's as timid as a hare."

"Timid? why he thrashed a cabinet-maker's

apprentice who picked a quarrel with him. He would have fought the whole crowd if they had allowed him."

"He's greatly changed then; but was it really Nicholas whom you saw?"

"Certainly, Nicholas Toupet from Ermenonville, who was to marry the daughter of M. Lucas."

"Oh! that's the one; but he will never marry me. I would rather die than be his wife!"

"Well! I don't share your opinion! and if he were to love me, I would gladly marry him!"

"Ah, madame, if you only knew M. Gustave, Colonel Moranval's nephew, you would see what a great difference there is between him and that vile Nicholas."

"I have never seen the colonel's nephew; he may be very handsome; but I will never agree that Nicholas is vile!"

The two opinions remained at variance, though in reality Madame Henri shared Suzon's opinion; but these ladies did not know Gustave's tricks. Being somewhat calmer after having related her adventures, Suzon had promised Madame Henri to follow her advice and to be good and obedient. They vowed mutual friendship and confidence. Suzon tried to pluck up courage. She counted on the colonel's promise that she should see Gustave again. Nevertheless, she had spent the whole night in tears; it was the first night that she had been parted from Gustave since leaving Ermenon-

ville. How interminable it seemed! how slowly time passes when away from one we love!

In the morning Madame Henri, who had heard Suzon's sobs, got up very quietly so as not to awaken the little one, who at last had fallen asleep from very fatigue. She went down alone to open the shop; and just at that moment Gustave hastily entered.

The silk-mercer thought she ought to tell Suzon of the arrival of the man whom she still took for Nicholas Toupet. She went upstairs and told the little one that he whom she detested was below.

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Suzon. "Ah, madame, I beg you not to tell him that I am in your house. Doubtless, he has come to hunt for me."

"I don't yet know what he is trying to do; he is disguised as a woman."

"A woman! that was so that I should not be frightened."

"Don't be afraid, I won't tell him that you are here; I merely warn you in order that you should not come down. Stay here. Why be afraid? I assure you that he shan't know anything."

Madame Henri went down again to Gustave, but Suzon was not reassured; Nicholas' arrival at the house of the silk-mercer was a proof in the eyes of the little one that the bridegroom elect still wanted to marry her. She got up, dressed, and in her anxiety she thought she heard Nicholas' footsteps on the stairs every moment. Her terror

was constantly increasing; she hastily made a bundle of her clothes, opened the door very softly, and went down the back staircase that led into the alley. This alley opened into the street; Suzon crept along the wall on the side of the street opposite to the shop, and then took to her heels with the bundle under her arms. She did not know where she was going; but at least she hoped she might escape Nicholas.

Gustave was resting in the shop without the least suspicion that Suzon was so near him. He was pleased to see that his pursuers had lost his trail. Presently Madame Henri returned.

"Madame," said Gustave, "you must do me a great favor, and that is to procure some man's clothes for me, for I can't keep on wearing this costume."

"I should be pleased to accommodate you," said Madame Henri, "but I am still a young woman and have to consider my reputation. What would the neighbors think of me if I were to borrow or buy a man's clothes? Moreover, monsieur, you can't undress here!"

"Haven't you any back room?"

"Yes, but you could be seen from the shop; somebody might come in at any moment, and there would be a fine scandal."

"Do you sleep in another room?"

"You can't use it. The people on my floor have very evil tongues; they might see you, and goodness knows what they might say."

"So, madame, you want me to depart thus strangely equipped, so that all the young ragamuffins may run after me and the guard arrest me."

"In the first place, I might ask you why you have assumed this disguise?"

"Ah, madame, we are the slaves of circumstances and the playthings of events. One man goes out to dine in the city, finds his friend dead, and attends the funeral; another goes to a ball, when he enters his own courtyard, a loose tile from the roof falls on his head and he is carried back to bed instead of attending the dance. Another man expects to spend the evening in agreeable company, dresses for the occasion, and is splashed by a cab; muddy from head to foot, he is forced to go back to change his clothes; he finds his wife did not expect him and she is playing écarté with a cousin; the gentleman is not very fond either of écarté or of the cousin, so he breaks out into a rage; the cousin goes away and then the wife raises a scene with her husband, calling him a monster and a tyrant and reproaching him with his jealousy; she becomes hysterical and the poor husband is obliged to run to the druggist's for ether and orange-flower water, and spends a whole evening on his wife that he expected to employ in playing cards and drinking punch. After that, what's the use of laying plans? For my part, madame, I assure you that when I left home yesterday I didn't expect to return in woman's clothes, but my own clothes were burned

up; and although I do not present a very graceful appearance in these, I thought that it was better to cover myself with a dress than to go naked, I sacrificed my self-esteem to a sense of decency; that's the reason I am disguised outside carnival time. Do I still meet with favor in your eyes?"

"Doubtless, you have suffered somewhat in my opinion. Then you have not just arrived from Ermenonville?"

"Ermenonville, what should I be doing there?"

"Don't you live with M. Lucas?"

"M. Lucas! Ah, I see the source of your error; but I must correct it. You will scold me, doubtless, and consider me a sad rascal, but you must know that I was never Nicholas Toupet."

"What, monsieur, you're not —"

"No, madame, I assumed that name, as I didn't want to be known at the wedding to which I was taken by M. Ledru."

"Is it possible? Then that accounts for poor Suzon insisting that Nicholas Toupet —"

"Suzon! Suzon! Ah, my dear Madame Henri, do you happen to know her?"

"Yes, monsieur, I know Suzon."

"Small, well-formed, fresh and pretty? Ah! Madame Henri, I beg you to tell me where she is. Have you seen her? Do you know where they have hidden her away?"

"Good heavens, what vivacity! what transports! but since you are not Nicholas, who are you?"

"I am he for whom Suzon has sacrificed everything, for whom she has deserted parents, friends and home — Gustave, the nephew of Colonel Moranval."

"You, Gustave! Ah, I ought to have guessed it."

"Is Suzon in your house? Yes, I'm sure of it; I can see it by your embarrassment. By letting me speak to her, you are afraid of my uncle's reproaches; but he won't know anything about it. Let me see her for only five minutes, and then I will go."

"Well, I can see very plainly that I must let you have your own way, or else you will be guilty of some fresh folly. Wait a moment and I'll tell her to come down."

Madame Henri went up to her room, and what was her astonishment to see no sign of Suzon. She went all through the house calling for her, and inquired of the neighbors, but it was all labor lost, for Suzon was already far away. Greatly disturbed, she returned to Gustave.

"Good heavens! here's another complication. Suzon is gone, she's no longer in the house."

"Gone! since I've been here?"

"I can imagine the reason of her flight, I went up to tell her of the arrival of him whom I thought to be Nicholas Toupet; she evidently believed that somebody had come for her, and ran away, so as not to go back to the man she detests."

" Poor Suzon ! I am again the cause of all her unhappiness. Where is she ? Without money and without resources, in a city with which she is unacquainted, what will become of her ? "

" Console yourself, M. Gustave, she will return here, I hope, and I promise to let you know."

" May you be right ! Will you be good enough to send for a cab to take me home ? "

" What will your uncle say when he sees you in that costume ? "

" He'll make a row, fly into a passion, and finally end by calming himself. When I have changed my clothes, I will again start out to find Suzon, and I will answer for it that all the cabs in the city won't be able to turn me aside from my route."

Madame Henri went for a cab, Gustave hurried into it, thanked the compassionate silk-mercer and told the driver to take him home to the colonel's.

Gustave got out in the courtyard, ordered the porter to pay the cabman, and ran upstairs to his room. Benoit and his father stood gaping in front of the cab. Here was Gustave, who had not been seen since the day before, and who now appeared in female garb. Here was a fresh matter of conjecture for the servants. While the porter was paying the cabman, Benoit hastened to inform the colonel that his nephew had just returned in a muddy petticoat, a torn dress and a bonnet soaked with yolk of egg.

The colonel had not seen Gustave since his

interview with Suzon; he did not doubt that his nephew had spent the night hunting for the young peasant, and he had prepared a very severe lecture by which he hoped to bring the youth to reason; but he did not know what to think when he learned that his nephew had returned disguised as a woman. The colonel went upstairs to Gustave with the intention of rebuking him severely upon his disorderly conduct. Gustave was in bed; he had counted on spending the day in searching for Suzon, but fate had prevented him from accomplishing his purpose; the gardener's bucket of water, his flight through the fields in his shirt, his light robe of taffeta and the race forced upon him from Belleville to the Rue aux Ours, had made our hero very ill; he did not resemble the heroes sung of by Homer, who were always victors because they were invincible. O thou fiery Achilles, who wert mortal only at the heel; thou savage Philoctetes, whose arrows never failed in their aim; thou eloquent Ulysses, who knew so well how to assume every form; thou proud Agamemnon, who allowed thy daughter to be strangled to make the gods favorable; thou charming Paris, protected by Venus: and thou audacious Telemachus, whom Minerva shrouded in a cloud when in the fray, I congratulate you all for having inspired the divine Homer. In our day your bragging would be of no value; to march to battle we have no longer any need of talismans; moreover, we do not believe in them,

and our soldiers rush to the attack through a hail of bullets without invoking Mercury's caduceus or Minerva's shield.

Gustave listened to his uncle's sermon without interrupting him, for the fever had made him low-spirited; our frail machinery is indeed so subservient to the ills of life that the greatest genius when ill is rarely superior to them. Charles XII, the most courageous and the most enterprising man of his century, allowed himself to be carried away like a child from the field of Pultowa, not so much because he was defeated as because he was weakened by his wound; and the savage Cromwell, who made everybody about him tremble, became, it is said, very tractable when he had an attack of fever.

The colonel, perceiving his nephew's condition, forgot his anger and sent for a doctor. At the end of an hour, the doctor arrived. He examined Gustave, sounded him, looked at his tongue, examined his urine and said very gravely, that probably tomorrow the nature of the illness would declare itself.

On the next day the doctor recognized the disease and told the colonel that it was inflammation of the lungs. The colonel was in despair, for he loved his nephew, although he scolded him; he told the doctor that if his nephew died he would blow out his brains. The doctor bowed politely to the colonel and never returned to the house; he was afraid of causing a suicide.

M. Moranval called in other doctors and consulted half the medical faculty; at last, after six weeks of danger, Gustave was saved, but his convalescence was slow. When he was strong enough to remember all that had happened, and to look about the room, Gustave thought of Suzon; he told Benoit to beg his uncle to come and see him.

The colonel hastened immediately to comply with his nephew's request.

"At last you are out of danger!" he exclaimed, as he embraced Gustave.

"Yes, uncle; but where is she? What has become of her?"

"Whom do you mean by she?"

"Suzon, uncle; that poor little thing that I kept hidden in this room and whom you took away to the silk-mercer's. She ran away from Madame Henri's because she mistook me for Nicholas Toupet. What has become of her in this immense city?"

"I have not the least idea; the disappearance of that young girl has caused me a great deal of anxiety, but it is not my fault. Are you still in love with that little peasant?"

"Yes, uncle, more than ever!"

"And Eugénie, Madame Fonbelle?"

"Oh, she is very amiable, but she does not love me. Has she sent to inquire for me during my illness?"

"Certainly, and very often, too."

"Indeed! Ah, if Suzon had known of it, she would have come to take care of me."

"Come, come; forget about Suzon, who cares no more about you, and think of Eugénie."

"Suzon not care for me! Oh, you judge her wrongly, uncle; she could never change!"

"You have said yourself that absence kills love."

"Yes, when it is light."

"And that women here are inconstant."

"Ah! but Suzon is not a Parisian."

"Was it to find her that you disguised yourself as a woman?"

"Uncle, six weeks in bed gives one time to think. I have compared all the women I have known. Suzon has the advantage over them all."

"Nevertheless, if you were married to Suzon, you would be unfaithful to her in a month."

"I don't think so, uncle."

"Well, I am sure of it; but make haste and get well; then, if you are sensible, you will renounce your past follies and get married, so that you may not be tempted to commit any more."

"Uncle, you are a terrible match-maker."

Gustave recovered slowly; every day Madame Fonbelle sent to inquire for the young invalid. Gustave was very appreciative of these attentions, and, little by little, the remembrance of Suzon was replaced by that of Eugénie.

Finally, Gustave was able to go out. His first visit was to Madame Henri.

"Have you seen Suzon?" he said as he entered the shop.

"Ah, monsieur, how you have changed."

"Tell me, Madame Henri, if you know what has become of Suzon?"

"No, monsieur, I have not seen her since you came into my shop disguised as a woman."

"Poor child! where can she be now?"

"At her parents, perhaps."

"Ah! I hope so; what did my uncle say to you?"

"He was angry; he scolded me; but I told him the whole truth, and he saw that it was not my fault."

Gustave went away very sad from Madame Henri's and called on Madame Fonbelle; Eugénie let him see all the pleasure she felt at his restored health, and evinced the tenderest interest in him. Gustave found Eugénie more charming than ever, and went home thinking seriously about his uncle's favorite project.

As he stepped out of the cab, he noticed that the porter was having a dispute with a little Savoyard of about fourteen or fifteen, who had placed his stool close to the gate of the house.

"What are you doing to this child?" said Gustave.

"Monsieur, he plants himself with his shoeblack's box close to the porte-cochère, and makes a mess. It is a great trouble to clean up, and this

little rascal comes here to soil my pavement! Look how black he is! it seems that, not content with cleaning shoes, he also sweeps chimneys."

The little boy hung his head, and did not answer a word; Gustave felt compassionate.

"M. Benoit, why do you drive the child away if he finds that he can gain a livelihood here? The street is free to all. I wish him to stay here."

"But, monsieur!"

"Hold your tongue! Here, little boy, here is a crown for you; I hope it will bring you good luck."

Gustave threw a crown piece to the little boy and went in, leaving the Savoyard very happy and the porter very foolish.

Our hero recovered; with renewed health, he regained his vitality and amorous ardor. Eugénie was the object of his desires; he spent nearly all his time by her side; he courted her assiduously. Eugénie responded to Gustave's love, but she would not grant him a single favor, and grew very angry if he misbehaved. Moreover, to please Eugénie, Gustave had to break off with his old acquaintances. No more Lise, no more Olivier, no more infidelities and skittishness — such were the conditions that Eugénie imposed upon her lover. These might have seemed natural enough to anybody else, but to Gustave they were a little severe. However, our hero, who was getting more and more in love, had sworn to keep his promises, and Eugénie had promised her hand to Gustave.

"That woman is indeed a little exacting," Gustave said to himself sometimes on returning home. "She was cross this evening because I talked to a lady while she was playing; I certainly do not intend to remain in society without talking, or to pass for an idiot or a pedant! Eugénie is jealous; but that is a proof of love, and, therefore, I must forgive it."

The colonel was delighted to see that his nephew was going to marry; the day was fixed; the idea of the union was no longer a secret, and Gustave escorted Madame Fonbelle everywhere.

Whenever Gustave returned home, he always found the little Savoyard before the gate. The little boy would always take off his cap to him, and would never leave his place till he had seen him go in.

In three weeks, Gustave was to become Eugénie's husband; the colonel was making many plans for the future happiness of the couple; M. de Grancière had a share in half of his friend's projects; Eugénie purchased dresses, materials and ribbons; and Gustave sighed and found the time long. Still three weeks! but how many events can happen in that space of time!

CHAPTER II

Woman's Intrigues. Jealousy. Fatal Meetings

"You must accompany me to Madame de Saint-Clair's entertainment this evening," said Eugénie one morning to Gustave; "there will be music; and, having heard that you have a good voice and know how to use it, for a long time they have wanted me to take you there so they could hear you sing."

"I don't like that Madame de Saint-Clair; that woman overwhelms you with demonstrations of friendship, protestations of affection and extravagant compliments. Do you really believe that she means what she says?"

"You know well enough, Gustave, that I value the ties of society for what they are worth; and to me Madame de Saint-Clair is a mere acquaintance. But her entertainments are brilliant; you enjoy yourself there, which is rare in large circles, because that severe etiquette and cold ceremony that kill gayety and banish pleasure in other houses do not exist in hers. Do come along; it will give so much pleasure to your uncle and my father and will please me."

"I will do whatever you wish, my dear Eugénie."

"Yes, I know that, while we are lovers; but when once we are married I shall have to be the one to yield to your will. Gustave, when I consider how marriage changes a man's conduct, ah! I tremble in advance. My friend, we ought not to get married!"

"What nonsense! you know how much I love you, and yet you think me capable of changing?"

"Oh, very capable! I am so happy now, why can't we stay as we are?"

"Certainly not, unless you will accord me all the rights of a husband."

"Ah, Gustave, you don't mean what you say! It is those very rights accorded to a husband that often cause the flight of love and pleasure. If, on the contrary, a husband had no more rights than a lover, marriage would preserve, despite the flight of time, all the charms of the first day."

"My dear Eugénie, you will never convert me; you will have to be my wife or my mistress."

"Sometimes a man loves neither; he keeps a mistress from habit and a wife from necessity. It is only a friend who can hope to be always a pleasure. I should like to be that only to you; but I love you passionately! That is a great pity."

"Between two persons of opposite sex one rarely sees ties that are only friendship unless that sentiment is the outgrowth of more intimate relations."

"Very well, I will be your wife, Gustave; but

I am jealous, and I do not want your love soon to change to mere friendship. I really am afraid that I shall make you unhappy; as the time draws near, I feel that I am becoming more exacting and uneasy."

"You don't seem to be ill-natured."

"No, but I love you too much, perhaps—and that's a great fault. Ah, my friend, how many women there have been whose husbands have found fault with them for this one crime!"

"I shall not be one of those husbands."

"Till this evening, Gustave. I must go and think about my toilet."

Gustave went home. On the way he thought of Eugénie's reflections, he did not think he could ever cease to love her, he did not fear that she would ever make him unhappy; but he was going to be married! Married! He, who had so often turned that bond into ridicule, who had made so many jokes about husbands, who had played them more than one trick and increased the sum of their mishaps; he must himself bear that name of husband, which he had despised and mocked a hundred times. The idea tormented him; after having frightened others, he trembled for himself; "par pari refero," that axiom disturbed him. Now, ladies, that is an imitation of the evangelical moral, do not do to others what you fear for yourself. It is by departing from this principle that among certain nations, particularly savages, they punish their

criminals only by the law of retaliation—"lex talionis"—a very wise law that ought to be in force among all civilized peoples.

So Gustave returned home, absorbed in his somewhat melancholy thoughts. He noticed that the little bootblack was seated on the curb before his gate, holding a handkerchief to his eyes and apparently overwhelmed with grief.

"What is the matter, my friend?" Gustave asked.

The boy did not answer but continued to sob.

"Monsieur," said Benoit, approaching his master, "I will tell you what the trouble is; a little while ago my father and I were talking, and we spoke of your coming marriage—of the wedding—of your wife—of the children you would have—of the breeches you would wear on that day—"

"Ah! you talked all that over with your father?"

"Yes, monsieur; because, as I want to do you honor, I must buy a second-hand sword to wear at my side when we go to the church—as I am young—if you wish me to look about for it—"

"Hurry up, Benoit, finish your foolishness, and above all do not think of wearing a sword."

"Ah, my father must also have his queue cut for the day of the ceremony, he must wear the Titus cut; you know perfectly well, monsieur, that he wears the pigeon-wings wig."

"Have you finished at last?"

"All right, monsieur, we were talking about the

costumes for your wedding. This boy stepped up familiarly and asked us who was the person who was going to get married. No sooner had I mentioned your name than he turned pale — yellow — red — that is to say, he was always black, but underneath the soot on his face I saw him change color, and ever since then he has been snivelling as you see him. Ah, I see what is the matter; he is afraid that your wife will think him too ugly to be allowed to stay at the gate."

"Benoit!"

"Monsieur!"

"You can go!"

Benoit withdrew, consigning to the devil the boy who stole some of his perquisites, for Gustave frequently charged the boy with commissions; the young bootblack always acquitted himself better than Benoit and always understood what Gustave said to him, although he received his orders with eyes on the ground and never spoke a word.

"What is the matter, my friend?" said Gustave, making a sign to his retainer to follow him into the courtyard. "Are you afraid that you will be sent away from here? Rest assured you shall stay; and when I take command of my house I will take you with me; you shall be my little page; will that suit you?"

The little boy made no reply, but he seized Gustave's hand, kissed it several times, and then suddenly ran away. Gustave was touched; he could

not understand the grief and the affection that this poor boy had shown for him; but the thought of Eugénie and his marriage soon chased the boy from his mind.

It is now evening. Gustave goes to call for Eugénie and her father; the colonel does not wish to go out, for he has a slight attack of gout. They go to Madame de Saint-Clair's. The assembly was large; Gustave was welcomed with much politeness, but our hero thought that he could read the expression of malicious pleasure in Madame de Saint-Clair's eyes. That lady, though not pretty, had great pretensions. She had shown so many attentions and marked preferences to Gustave at M. de Grancière's entertainments that he had quickly divined her feelings; but Madame de Saint-Clair did not please him; he had feigned not to understand her, however, and he rightly dreaded her resentment; women will excuse a man they do not love from paying court to them, but they cannot pardon anyone whom they distinguish with attention for not responding to their love.

The brilliancy of the candles, the toilets, the music, in short, everything made the gathering seem a kind of fête. Gustave looked restlessly at the ladies seated around the room to see if he could find any of his acquaintances. Knowing already how jealous Eugénie was, he wished to avoid causing her unhappiness. Happily, he did not perceive any intimate friends. He was now more at ease.

Eugénie, whose lovely voice was well-known, was soon at the piano, and Gustave, who could not yet accompany her, took a vacant chair between an old dowager and a lady who wore a hat that concealed nearly her entire face. Eugénie saw where Gustave had seated himself and smiled on him tenderly.

"Come," he said, "she is satisfied; doubtless the lady in the big hat is ugly."

While Eugénie was singing, Gustave addressed to his neighbor a few of those insignificant words and phrases which are habitually exchanged in society and which fatigue neither the mind nor heart. However, the lady in the hat did not reply.

"This is singular," said Gustave to himself, "it is customary in society to reply to those who address us, and I have not said anything to this lady that could possibly offend her. Is she deaf? Is she also a grandmother?"

He leaned his head slightly forward and tried to look under the hat. She was a young woman, but she was not pretty; her face was blotched, and seemed cut up by seams and scars. Gustave retired, determined to say nothing more to his silent neighbor, when a sweet and very familiar voice came from under the large hat; it only said these words, "Is it true, Gustave, that you don't recognize me?" but these accents penetrated to the depths of his heart. He turned around suddenly and a cry escaped him; the same voice was again heard, "Take care, Gustave, eyes are upon us."

"What! this is no illusion? It is you, my dear Julie?"

"Yes, it is I — it is Julie — although I am hardly recognizable!"

"Ah! my friend, pardon me!"

"I have nothing to complain of, Gustave; why should I be angry? I know how I look now."

"But what has happened? What illness has overtaken you?"

"This was no illness. Do you remember that cruel night when I had so much trouble to save you in the pavilion? you know what means I employed; but you did not have your clothes; and the gardener threw a bucket of water over you. I went back to my room to look for your clothes, as soon as I had them I ran after you, but, stifled by smoke, I lost consciousness. My hair caught fire — I was saved — but I was never myself again."

"Dear Julie! and this was on my account! Oh, misery! I am the cause of all your misfortune."

"My friend, I never complain! I have done wrong, I deserve punishment."

"Ah, Julie! and to think of the women who are a hundred times more guilty than you and who have escaped!"

"I have lost your love, but I hope to keep your friendship."

"You have it, and for life."

"Then, Gustave, you must give me an immediate proof of it."

"Speak!"

"I want to preserve the little happiness that remains to me, and therefore my husband's peace must not be disturbed — he will be here in a few minutes."

"Here?"

"Yes; he has never met you since that fatal day. Ah, Gustave, I fear this meeting — I entreat you to avoid this trouble! — I now see the trap that was set for me. Madame de Saint-Clair knows M. Desjardins; she must have learned from him that you once came to see me."

"You are right, that woman has planned some unhappy scene; there is only one way to escape it — I will go."

"Ah, my friend, how I will thank you! I know that you are here with your future wife, and that it is hard for you to leave her — but this sacrifice is the last that you will make for me; you will go back to Eugénie, but Julie is lost to you forever."

"Dear Julie! only by great sacrifices could I prove that I am not unworthy of the attachment that you have shown for me! Good-by, I will go; may we meet again in a place where we may be free to give ourselves up to the feelings of our hearts!"

Gustave pressed Julie's hand tenderly and rose to move towards the drawing-room door.

Madame de Saint-Clair followed all Gustave's movements; she placed herself directly in front of him when he tried to leave the drawing-room.

"Why, monsieur," she exclaimed, loud enough for Eugénie to hear, "are you going to leave us already?"

"No, madame," replied Gustave, concealing his anger. "I am just going out to get a little fresh air."

During this colloquy, Eugénie, who was greatly disturbed, played and sang wrong notes, for she was watching Gustave. The latter was just about to get rid of Madame de Saint-Clair when two new arrivals entered the drawing-room and barred his passage. There was great surprise on the one side and embarrassment on the other; for these two personages were M. de Berly and M. Desjardins. Gustave stood stock-still. M. de Berly gave an exclamation which caused all eyes to be turned towards him; Desjardins opened his eyes wide in amazement and tried to speak; and Madame de Saint-Clair enjoyed Gustave's situation and Eugénie's wretchedness.

The scene soon changed. Julie had seen her husband enter before Gustave's departure, she feared an explanation and her strength gave way; she fainted and fell over on her neighbor, an old lady occupied in playing with her pug dog, the dog barked, the old lady was in despair, not on account of Julie's fainting, but because she feared her little dog was hurt. She gave piercing screams. Everybody rushed to Julie; only M. de Berly was not quite decided whether he should pay attention to

Gustave or to his wife. But our hero, who felt that his presence was more dangerous than ever, approached M. de Berly, "If you wish to speak to me, monsieur, I am at your service, and here is my address."

Having said these words, Gustave slipped his card into M. de Berly's hand, and left the room without giving him time to reply.

"That young man is still a little mad," M. de Berly remarked, as he approached his wife, who was recovering consciousness.

"Mad! monsieur," replied Madame de Saint-Clair; "he has never been anything of the sort."

"Pardon me, madame, pardon me! Oh, indeed he has, and very mad. Good heavens! I know all about it and so does my wife! Poor little wife! I am sure she became ill because she feared this meeting would result in a scene. I wanted to fight a duel with Saint-Réal; you know, Desjardins, that I said I should have killed him."

"Yes! I remember very well, even at that time."

"But, really, I do not want to fight with a madman! It is not worth while; moreover, my wife forbade me to do it."

"But, indeed, monsieur, you are certainly mistaken. My dear Eugénie, isn't it true that M. Gustave has all his wits about him?"

Madame Fonbelle could hardly speak. The sudden departure of Gustave, M. de Berly's words, and the fainting of his wife had brought trouble

and jealousy into her heart. She looked at Julie very uneasily and could not understand the scene that had taken place. To increase her anguish, Madame de Saint-Clair asked her a thousand questions, was sympathetic regarding her pallor, and with perfidious attentions tried to redouble Eugénie's embarrassment and augment her grief and suspicion.

The day after this adventure Gustave went to call on Eugénie very early. He expected reproaches, Madame Fonbelle made none. Her manner was changed, she was no longer the same; cold and reserved, she replied to the ardent Gustave, who could not understand this change. Hasty and angry, he demanded, he exacted an explanation. She kept a sullen silence.

Gustave rose to take his departure.

"Monsieur," Eugénie said, finally, "I am going this evening to the François theatre, would you care to accompany me?"

"Willingly, madame, I will take great pleasure in calling for you."

"What is the meaning of this caprice?" said Gustave, as he returned to his uncle's, "she seemed angry, yet she proposed that I should accompany her to the play. Well, let us wait until this evening; perhaps I shall then learn the meaning of this enigma."

"How goes the love affair?" asked the colonel; "I hope the marriage will soon take place."

"On my soul, uncle, I can't tell you anything about it; Eugénie is a strange woman. I believe that somebody has set her against me. She is angry about an occurrence that doesn't concern her in the least, and if she is willing to believe perfidious words that are retailed to her now, what will it be when we are married?"

"Bah! all that is only a lover's quarrel. To-morrow, or even this evening, you will think no more about it."

After dinner Gustave called for Madame Fonbelle, who was waiting for him. They started for the play, but they went in silence; Eugénie was sad and seemed much preoccupied; Gustave, vexed at Eugénie's conduct, did not try to start a conversation.

They arrived and took their seats. The box contained vacant places. Soon two ladies entered, one was Madame de Saint-Clair, the other was a young woman, quite pretty, and her face was not altogether unknown to Gustave. He tried to recall her features, while Eugénie, seated in front, chatted with Madame de Saint-Clair. The lady, on her part, appeared surprised to see Gustave; they looked at each other, they smiled and recognized each other. The person who accompanied Madame de Saint-Clair was none other than Madame Dubourg, the one who spent the night waiting for her brother while her husband was on guard.

Eugénie appeared to be so busy talking to

Madame de Saint-Clair that Gustave thought he might venture to bow. Madame Dubourg did not seem to know that Gustave was with Eugénie; she had begun to address a few words to him when a gentleman entered the box. From his manner of speaking to Madame Dubourg, Gustave recognized the husband, the gentleman who always wore shirt frills and whom he threw into the gutter to escape from the patrol.

M. Dubourg was a tall man, and vain; he looked at the ladies through his opera-glasses, shaking his little finger on which was displayed a diamond ring; he expressed his opinion of the play, the actors and the audience in a very loud voice. He and Gustave soon engaged in conversation. Madame Dubourg no longer looked at Gustave. Eugénie was always serious, and Madame de Saint-Clair listened smilingly to everything that was said.

How in the devil, you will ask, perhaps, did this woman De Saint-Clair, who seemed to foment disunion between Gustave and Eugénie, know that Madame Dubourg knew our hero? How? Why, through her laundress, who, for the unhappiness of the future couple, happened to be little Lise of the Rue Charlot.

Lise was not wicked, but she loved to gossip and to take revenge when the occasion presented itself. Madame de Saint-Clair had learned that Mademoiselle Lise knew Gustave very well. Without any trouble she had induced her to talk of the

handsome young fellow who was such a bad lot; a grisette will always make a parade of her connection with a young man in high society.

Madame de Saint-Clair had learned from Lise the adventure of the night, Gustave's encounter with the patrol and Madame Dubourg's morning visit to the little laundress.

From the knowledge thus gained Madame de Saint-Clair directed her batteries. She knew Monsieur and Madame de Berly, but that was not sufficient, she succeeded in forming an acquaintance with Madame Dubourg. For a long time she meditated upon her revenge, she planned meetings and catastrophes, she wrote anonymous letters to Eugénie, telling her of Suzon's sojourn at the Moranval house; a circumstance that she guessed from what the elder Benoit told her, for he was not certain himself. Thus it was that Madame de Saint-Clair destroyed Eugénie's peace of mind and created suspicion and grief in the heart of a woman already too much inclined to jealousy.

And why all this perfidy? To avenge herself upon Gustave who had scorned her, and Eugénie whom she detested.

If you wish to know how far the resources of the imagination can go in destroying the happiness of a rival, seek it in the heart of a vindictive woman.

But it was not sufficient to bring these people together, some violent scene must be developed; Madame de Saint-Clair succeeded. In order to do

this, she began a conversation with Gustave, at first on indifferent subjects but soon she led it to other topics.

"M. Saint-Réal," she said with a malicious glance at Madame Dubourg, "I hope that when you are married you won't make the patrol run after you any more."

"What do you mean, madame?"

"I have lately heard of one of your follies — which was quite pardonable in a youth. I laughed heartily over it."

"What was that?" Eugénie inquired.

"A very amusing adventure; monsieur had a nocturnal appointment with a lady, I think it was in the Rue Charlot —"

"But, madame, this story concerns only myself, and —"

"Good heavens! why be annoyed, M. Saint-Réal? you are entirely master of your own actions. Well, while monsieur was talking with his charmer, who lived on the first floor, a patrol passed. The husband was in the National Guard; he saw a young man talking to his wife and gave chase to him."

"That's quite enough, madame. I don't know what your motive is in relating this story, but I declare that it is entirely false."

"False! Ah, monsieur, I must appeal to M. Dubourg; he lives in the Rue Charlot, and must remember the noise you made that night by knocking at every door."

M. Dubourg had not opened his lips since the beginning of Madame de Saint-Clair's story, but he listened to it very attentively, and appeared to be greatly agitated. What monsieur feared more than anything else was to look like a fool and a laughing-stock. He thought he saw in this conversation between Madame de Saint-Clair and Gustave a scene purposely prepared to mystify him; from that moment he vowed to avenge himself for this affront, and, after darting a terrible glance at his wife, he touched Gustave's arm and invited him to follow him.

Madame Dubourg wept and was in despair as she saw her husband go out with Gustave; Madame de Saint-Clair feigned the greatest astonishment and asked what it all meant. Eugénie did not utter a word, but it was quite evident that she was suffering and trying to hide her feelings.

Meanwhile, Gustave followed Monsieur Dubourg out of the theatre. Finally he inquired, "May I ask, monsieur, what you have to say to me and why you are thus taking me out for a stroll?"

"You know very well, monsieur, that you have outraged me. There is no need for me to explain to you matters with which you are perfectly familiar, but I want you to know that you cannot mock me openly, to my face. It's bad enough to cuckold a husband, but, at least so long as he is kept in ignorance of it, he need not blush at it. To tell

him of it in the presence of witnesses is carrying it somewhat too far, and I won't let it go by."

"Monsieur, I should like to remind you that I did not say a single word of all that,— in the first place because there is no truth in it, and secondly, because I am not such a coward as to compromise your wife in that manner. One may knock at your door at night without going upstairs. Consider also, monsieur, that a favored lover would not be likely to make a noise and awaken an entire neighborhood."

"Ah, so monsieur confesses that it was he!"

"Yes, monsieur, but I was not acquainted with your wife."

"Tell that to others. Monsieur, you have made a cuckold of me, that fact is perfectly clear; and you must answer for it to me."

"Monsieur, do you think that you ought to believe the scandalous tongue of a woman who is trying to create trouble in a household?"

"Madame de Saint-Clair is an honest woman, and incapable of saying what is untrue. Certainly, if she had known that I was the husband in the patrol she would not have related your adventure in my presence. These denials shall not deceive me, I am an abused husband; that's a misfortune that happens to many people of intelligence."

"But, monsieur—"

"I am a cuckold, monsieur, that's as clear as day."

"Well, monsieur, I will not contradict you, be one as much as you like; it's no affair of mine."

"Monsieur! so you add fresh outrages; we must fight!"

"Let us fight, monsieur, and put an end to the matter."

Gustave and M. Dubourg agreed to a hostile meeting on the following day. The husband went back to the theatre and Gustave remained behind in the street, wondering whether he ought to return to Eugénie. By going back to the box, he feared he might redouble the embarrassment of Madame Dubourg and the joy of the perfidious Saint-Clair, however, not to return for Eugénie, who had come alone with him to the play, would be a breach of good manners. "Let us go back," said Gustave to himself. "Poor Madame Dubourg! It must be confessed that her husband is a singular man, he will insist on being a cuckold, and wants to hold me responsible for it. I certainly am very unlucky; I have deceived many men who have known nothing about it, and now it's a man whose wife I hardly know that forces me to draw my sword. Ah! Madame Dubourg, if the opportunity ever presents itself, I will try to render your husband no longer a liar!"

Gustave had the door of his box opened for him; but the Dubourgs were no longer there. Eugénie also had gone away, and Madame de Saint-Clair was left alone. She turned around and looked at

Gustave; she did not say anything, but smiled; and her perfidious smile fully expressed all the feelings in her heart.

Gustave was about to break out, but he controlled his rage, the sight of which, he knew, would only increase the pleasure of the artful woman. He departed without giving vent to his anger and indignation against Madame de Saint-Clair. He remembered that she belonged to a sex that must be respected even though the individual is only worthy of contempt.

CHAPTER III

A Duel. The Little Savoyard. A Space of Three Years

Gustave, after leaving the theatre, went to Madame Fonbelle's house in the hope of pacifying her and justifying himself; but the chambermaid told him that her mistress did not wish to receive anybody and had given her orders that she was not to be disturbed on any account whatever.

"What, not even her future husband?" cried Gustave in astonishment.

"Nobody at all, monsieur. Those are madame's orders."

"Ah!" exclaimed our hero, as he returned to his uncle's house, "I am not married yet, it seems. Eugénie is exceedingly jealous. The idea of getting angry about little things that happened before we even became acquainted. That's being altogether too susceptible. I love her dearly, however, and I feel that I should always be faithful to her; that she does not believe because I have the reputation of being flighty, but I do not believe I am quite so bad as my reputation and there is still some good left in me."

Gustave did not say anything to his uncle about his last adventure, and the next day at dawn he got up to keep his appointment.

In order to avoid Benoit's gossip, Gustave decided not to take him. But, since fortune might be against him, and it is just as well to have somebody with you in case you have to be brought back home, Gustave made up his mind to take along with him the young messenger whose zeal in his service had never failed.

Gustave took his pistols and left his apartment. Everybody was still asleep in the house, the front gate of which was shut. It was necessary to awaken the porter, which was annoying to Gustave; however, he went and knocked on the window-pane, and asked to have the gate opened.

Instead of simply pulling the cord, the porter got up in his nightshirt, put his head out of the window, and looked to see who was leaving the house so early.

"What! that's you, M. Gustave?"

"Yes, it's I, M. Benoit; open the gate, if you please."

"Monsieur is going out very early this morning. Is Colonel Moranval indisposed? Has his gout returned? Is —"

"My uncle is asleep, I hope; and you weary me with your questions. Open quickly — hurry."

"But I don't see my son to accompany you, monsieur. Benoit! Benoit!"

"Devil take you! If I had needed your son, I should have waked him up myself. Open the gate, your chatter annoys me."

Gustave's tone was one that admitted of no reply. The porter opened the gate with profuse excuses. Now, being outside, Gustave at first fears lest the young bootblack may not yet have arrived as he looks at the spot he usually occupies; but the little fellow is already seated at his post, eating a piece of bread and watering it with his tears. Gustave softly approaches him and touches him on the shoulder; the bootblack, troubled at the sight of Gustave, hastened to dry his tears.

"What is it, my young friend? I see you always crying, why don't you tell me what the trouble is? If you are in want, or your parents are unfortunate, take this purse and don't stint yourself. I have often squandered money on follies, but I am not at all forward in aiding the unfortunate."

"I am not in need of anything," the little fellow answered in low tones, as he pushed aside the purse Gustave offered him.

The latter experienced a feeling that he could not define. The accents of the poor little fellow were as gentle as those of a woman, and echoed in the very depths of Gustave's heart; he tried to recall at what period of his life so sweet a voice had already made his heart palpitate.

But time was flying, and he must not make M. Dubourg wait.

" Follow me," said Gustave, " I need your services."

He got up immediately and followed our hero, who went in the direction of the Allée des Veuves in the Champs-Elysées, where he was to meet M. Dubourg. In fact, Gustave soon caught him strolling along the path. He made his little companion stop about a hundred paces from M. Dubourg, and ordered him to stay there till he was sent for. He did as he was told, and Gustave advanced towards M. Dubourg.

" I am exceedingly sorry, monsieur, to have kept you waiting."

" There is no harm done, monsieur, I have only just arrived. Have you your pistols ? "

" Yes, but let us go a little farther on, I beg you, I am anxious that that child who has followed me shall not see us."

" Just as you please, monsieur."

They went a few steps farther into another alley. Gustave stopped and the two adversaries took up position.

" Fire, monsieur ! " cried Gustave, " you consider yourself the injured one, and so it's for you to begin."

M. Dubourg did not wait to be entreated, he took aim at Gustave and hit him in the right side. He fell and M. Dubourg ran up to him.

" Well, monsieur, will you acknowledge at last that you have made a cuckold of me ? "

"No, monsieur, no, I will never confess to a thing that is not true, and at the point of death I again tell you that you are mistaken."

"In that case, monsieur, I am very sorry for what has occurred. I will send a carriage and your little attendant to you."

M. Dubourg went away and found the boy very anxious; he had heard the report of the pistol and was about to go and try to find Gustave when M. Dubourg came and told him that his master was wounded. The poor boy flew to the place where Gustave was lying on the ground covered with blood. He went up and wanted to aid him, but his strength failed and he fell fainting beside the wounded man.

"On my word!" exclaimed Gustave, "that was a fine idea of mine to bring this child with me when he is overcome by the sight of a wound. I wish I could revive him, but I have nothing about me. I feel that I can't walk, and nobody is in sight. It's very early, if M. Dubourg can't find a carriage to send to me, we shall be a long time without help."

Gustave shouted, but nobody appeared; he tried to walk and summon assistance, but himself fell unconscious beside the boy.

Fortunately for our hero and his companion, M. Benoit, the house-porter, was as inquisitive as talkative. After opening his gate, he had immediately called his son, who had just got up. The

latter hastened to his father and found him excitedly walking up and down the yard and then from time to time looking through the window of his lodge that opened on the street.

"What is the matter, papa?"

"Some mystery, my boy, something suspicious in M. Gustave's behavior. He has just gone out of the house like a madman, without deigning to reply to me. Look, there he is, talking to the little messenger boy."

"Ah, yes, he's a favorite of his, you know that well enough."

"Wait, he's going away and the boy is following him. Benoit, he's your master and you also ought to follow him, but at a distance."

"I haven't a hat here."

"Take my black silk cap. Go quickly, don't lose sight of them. You will tell me all that you have been able to learn."

"Set your mind at ease."

So Benoit had followed at a distance. When his master had made the boy stop, he had done the same, he had heard the pistol-shot, had seen M. Dubourg going away, and had run after him to ask if his master was wounded. On receiving an affirmative reply, he had gone to get a carriage, and arrived on the field of battle a few moments after Gustave had lost consciousness.

With the help of the coachman, Benoit placed his master in the carriage, got in beside him and

told the coachman to drive on, without troubling about the boy, whom he left unaided. M. Benoit was vindictive, it was very easy for him to revenge himself upon one whom he disliked. Fools are generally spiteful, it belongs only to great minds to pardon offences and return good for evil.

They arrived at the house. Gustave recovered consciousness and was received by his uncle. The latter was walking up and down his room in considerable anxiety on his nephew's account — for the porter had taken care to inform him of all the events of the morning with amplifications — and swearing at his gout that prevented him from going out.

Fortunately Gustave's wound was a slight one and there was no cause for anxiety. It was not till after receiving this assurance that the colonel scolded his nephew. The latter was telling his uncle all that had happened the night before when a letter was brought to him from Madame de Fonbelle. Gustave read it and passed it on to his uncle.

"Is it a reconciliation?" asked the colonel.

"Read it, uncle, you will see that it is impossible to get me married."

The colonel read the following letter,—

GUSTAVE: — I do not wish to make either you or myself unhappy by marrying you. I feel that I love you too much to be happy with you. Your light and fickle nature would constantly put my heart to the most cruel suffering. Two days ago, I

received proofs of your inconstancy ; and the past makes me tremble for the future. Adieu! The Julies, Dubourgs, Lises, and village girls will console you for the loss of

EUGÉNIE.

" May the devil fly away with all women, lovers, intrigues and marriages ! " cried the colonel, as he threw away the letter, " but still, it's your own fault; you are continually guilty of some fresh foolishness."

" My dear uncle, this time, allow me to tell you, I am not in the least guilty; a malicious woman has done it all. Madame de Saint-Clair has brought about all the scenes that have taken place. She has been trying for a long time to make me lose Eugénie's heart, and she has succeeded at last. But if, before becoming my wife, Madame Fonbelle is willing to believe everything that people say about me, I ought not to regret the loss of her hand. In order to live happily together, people ought not to keep secrets from one another; and, more especially, they ought not to lend their ear to the tales of others who may try to disturb their repose."

" If you were really in love with Eugénie you would not reason as coldly as that. Well, I see that it is written that you are to die a bachelor."

" No, uncle, no — I shall marry, I wish to give you that satisfaction; and since I can't find here a woman who wants me, as soon as my wound is healed I will travel. I will go to Switzerland,

where they say that women are sincere; to England, where they love with passion; I will visit the four quarters of the globe, if I must; and perhaps I may end in finding a woman who is not afraid to marry a bad lot. But, by the way, I don't see — Benoit! Benoit!"

"Here I am, monsieur."

"Was it you who found me unconscious in the Champs-Élysées?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then you must have noticed beside me a little messenger-boy; the poor boy who fainted when he found me wounded."

"Ah! the boy on the corner?"

"Exactly! Answer me; what did you do with him?"

"I? Nothing at all, monsieur."

"What! you idiot; did you abandon the little fellow without giving him any assistance?"

"Monsieur, he ran away as soon as he saw me."

"Ran away! when he was in a swoon!"

"Oh, pardon me, monsieur, he was singing when I arrived with the carriage."

"Singing! instead of fetching help for me! Benoit, you're trying to impose on me."

"Monsieur has only to ask my father and he will learn that I have been properly brought up, and that—"

"Benoit, if that boy does not appear again in front of the house today, I will discharge you."

"But, monsieur —"

Benoit was trying to exculpate himself when a noise was heard in the courtyard; a servant came up to say that the little bootblack had just arrived at the house, and was insistent on being allowed to see M. Gustave.

"Let him come in," said Gustave.

The little fellow came running into the room and threw himself down on his knees beside the bed of the wounded youth, seized his hand and covered it with tears, unable to say a word on account of his emotion.

"Oh, the little dissembler!" said Benoit to himself, "how he plays the hypocrite; and all that because he wants to try to be my master's valet and jockey!"

Gustave reassured the boy as to his health, told him of the extent of his injuries and questioned him to find out whether Benoit had told the truth about what happened.

While Gustave was interrogating the lad, and Benoit was trying to think of some way to excuse himself to his master, the colonel was scrutinizing the little fellow and seemed to be deeply preoccupied.

M. Benoit was scolded; the bootblack was rewarded for his attachment to Gustave; and the sick man was left to get a little repose, which we may be sure he stood in need of.

At the end of ten days Gustave's wound was

healed. During this time the colonel had found out what Madame Fonbelle was doing; with difficulty, he learned that she had gone down to one of her country seats. This news deprived him of all hope of renewing the engagement between his nephew and Eugénie, for Gustave was not the kind of man to run after a woman who seemed to be trying to avoid him.

As soon as Gustave was well he began to make preparations for his travels; he had decided to go away for a time from France, where there was now nothing to hold him. For the sake of pleasing Madame Fonbelle he had given up all his old acquaintances; Julie had said farewell to all intrigues; the opera-dancers had lost all attraction for our hero; little Lise had just married a hatter and was satisfied with maddening her husband; Suzon had disappeared; Olivier, continuing to gamble instead of going to his office, had lost his place, and his conduct was so irregular that Gustave, who preserved his self-respect even in his follies, could no longer frequent the society of a man who only ran after the girls and went to low resorts. So Gustave had nothing left to keep him in Paris. He told the colonel of his resolve, and the latter approved, in the hope that travel would ripen his nephew's mind.

Gustave made all his preparations and consented to take Benoit with him, in order to prove to his uncle that he had no intention of plunging into fresh

intrigues — for Benoit's reputation was made; it was well-known that he was good for nothing but to wait at table and groom a horse.

Benoit was delighted to follow Gustave, for at first he had been afraid that his master might be inclined to take the little messenger boy with him. In his delight he talked to his father constantly about his approaching travels, and took care that his conversation should reach the ears of the little fellow outside, because he saw that it troubled him. Benoit was naturally fond of teasing.

The day of the departure arrives. The colonel wants to accompany his nephew as far as Saint-Germain. He has his carriage made ready and Benoit is sent on in advance with horses, for Gustave wants to travel on horseback; and, in truth, that is the most agreeable way to get a good knowledge of the country through which we travel.

On getting into the carriage Gustave looked about for his friend the bootblack, whom he wanted to leave with some token of his generosity; but he was not in his customary place, neither was his box there nor his little bench. Gustave was astonished at the absence of the little fellow, and was sorry to leave without having seen him.

The carriage started, and they arrived at Saint-Germain in two hours. The colonel drove to the inn where Benoit had been appointed to meet them; they were nearly there when a country cart, going like the wind, collided with the colonel's carriage,

which had no time to avoid it. The awkward driver upset the light carriage and then whipped up his own horses to escape from the colonel's anger.

Gustave and his uncle fell to the ground; the colonel got up swearing and was not much hurt. Gustave had a sprained ankle. But plaintive cries were heard behind them, a crowd immediately gathered around the carriage; the colonel went to see if anybody had been hurt by the upsetting of his carriage, and saw a little bootblack being picked up and carried into the inn. Gustave uttered an exclamation of surprise; he recognized his little messenger boy and learned from the bystanders that he was riding behind the carriage when it was upset.

"For heaven's sake, uncle," cried Gustave, "get them to give that poor boy all possible attention while I go and get my foot bandaged."

The colonel complied with his nephew's wish and followed the boy in. Gustave, whose ankle was paining him greatly, was taken into another room and Benoit fetched a barber-surgeon who undertook to cure sprained ankles in twenty-four hours.

Gustave, forced to remain in a room without moving, grew impatient at his uncle's delay in returning; he was anxious for news of the little bootblack. He was about to send Benoit to look for him when Colonel Moranval entered the room. The colonel's face was pale and troubled; his

features showed such agitation that Gustave was frightened.

"What's the matter with you, uncle? What has happened? Is that poor boy mortally injured?"

"No, no, his injuries are very slight; they won't amount to anything."

"Then what is the cause of your agitation?"

"Our tumble might easily upset a man's nerves."

"But you weren't in that condition before you went to look after the boy; you are hiding something; in heaven's name, tell me what it is."

"I'm not hiding anything from you; what the devil do you expect me to tell you? The little bootblack is scarcely hurt at all; but he is slightly dazed with fright; he'll have got over it tomorrow."

"How did he happen to be up behind our carriage?"

"Apparently he had run after us."

"Run after us! with what intention?"

"The devil! with the intention of stealing a ride, doubtless. Don't you know that it is customary for little rascals to get up behind carriages?"

"Nevertheless, uncle —"

"Come, now, that's enough with regard to the boy; I tell you there's scarcely anything the matter with him; I have given him some money to pay for his remedies, and now don't worry about him any more. As for yourself, since a sprain is not dangerous, you can set out on your way tomorrow. Good-by, I'm going back to Paris."

"What, uncle! are you going to leave me all by myself in this inn? What is it that's so pressing? You can return to Paris just as well tomorrow."

"I tell you that I must start at once; probably I have private reasons for returning home; you can surely remain alone in an inn for one day; since you are going all through Europe, it is to be presumed that that will sometimes happen to you. Adieu; embrace me, Gustave; you have money and letters of recommendation for various countries; and moreover you know that you may draw on me at need, I will honor your drafts if you behave yourself well. Travel and try to be guilty of no more indiscretions; and if you come across a good, gentle and faithful woman, bring her back with you and she shall be your wife; but remember that I insist on these three qualities."

The colonel tenderly embraced his nephew and left him. A few moments later Gustave heard the sound of the wheels as the carriage departed.

Gustave fancied that there was something extraordinary in the colonel's behavior; his visible emotion on his return to speak to his nephew and his sudden resolve to depart immediately when there was nothing to call him back to Paris seemed to cover some hidden mystery. Gustave tried to fathom it, but he vainly racked his brains to discover the motive of this prompt departure. He hoped he might be more successful on the morrow, when he would question the little bootblack.

After dinner Gustave ordered Benoit to go and find out how the little wounded boy was. The servant went and soon returned.

"Well, Benoit, how is the poor boy?"

"Well, monsieur, it would seem that he is pretty well, since he has gone away."

"Gone away! the injured lad has gone away! Come! that's not possible!"

"Monsieur, I merely repeat what they told me; I am also greatly astonished."

"You are mad, Benoit!"

"But, monsieur, what is stranger still is that the maid of the inn assured me that your uncle took him away in his carriage."

"My uncle took the bootblack with him?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes! He took every possible care of him; he would not allow anybody but himself to help the boy into the carriage; that little blackguard must certainly be a sorcerer to make friends with the colonel like that."

Gustave was greatly astonished at his uncle's conduct; but he attributed this last action to the colonel's goodness; for under a somewhat harsh exterior was hidden a kind and compassionate heart.

Two days later our hero found himself well enough to mount his horse; so he left Saint-Germain to begin his travels.

Instead of following the road to Italy, which he had intended to take, Gustave turned aside and went towards Ermenonville.

Benoit, who did not know the road, was very curious to know where his master was going. He was a little less timid than he was on his first journey with Gustave; he willingly brought his horse up close to that of our young traveller, but he did not as yet dare to ask any questions.

At last they arrived in the village. Benoit recognized the château, the little bridge, and Father Lucas' house, before which Gustave stopped; he could not resist the desire to know what they were going to do here.

"Monsieur, are we going to stay here again?"

"You will see."

"Monsieur, are we going to turn the house upside down again, make the cows run away and the old woman yell?"

"Benoit, I will do as I please. If you ask me any more questions, I will send you back to Paris."

"I will not speak again, monsieur."

Gustave entered the courtyard of the house; a peasant girl gave a cry on perceiving the young man; it was Marie-Jeanne, who had recognized Gustave. The latter was very glad before seeing the Lucas family to learn from the young peasant how he would be received, so he beckoned to the fat girl to come and speak to him.

"What, is that you, monsieur? Ah, I never expected to see you again. Why, it is nearly a year since you were here, yes, it will be a year in three months, it was about prune time —"

"Tell me, my dear Marie-Jeanne, how they all are? Are they as happy and gay as ever?"

"Oh, monsieur, there has been a great change, but of course you have not heard of it. Mamzelle Suzon has left us. But come in, monsieur, my mistress will tell you all about it."

Gustave saw by Marie-Jeanne's discourse that they were ignorant of the true cause of Suzon's flight. He went into the house, where he found Father and Mother Lucas.

The peasants received him with friendliness. Father Lucas did not talk as much as formerly, but his wife was as voluble as ever, and she told Gustave all about the disappearance of her daughter. Mother Lucas wept while talking of Suzon, and the tears of the good woman fell on Gustave's heart, for he knew that he was the cause of them. If he had never stayed in Lucas' house the young girl would have remained in the village. Peaceful in her parent's home, she would never have dreamed of other pleasures, and her heart would have rejected any thought of separation from them; but the presence of Gustave had changed everything, and Mother Lucas never suspected that she was talking to the very one who had turned the head of her little Suzon. Gustave was astonished when he learned that for the last two months Suzon had written to her parents frequently, though without giving them her Paris address, because she always feared that they would force her to marry Nicholas.

"She is entirely wrong, the dear child," added Mother Lucas. "Good heavens, Nicholas Toupet is married, he doesn't think any more about her. As for us, I was very grieved and very angry when she first went away, but since she has written us such tender letters and begged our forgiveness for what she has done—ah, upon my word, I am quite ready to forgive her, and I hope that she will soon come back."

"She is still in Paris," said Gustave to himself, "and she has never tried to see me since she ran away from the silk-mercer's! Well, Suzon does not love me any longer. Suzon is like all the rest, she has listened to the proposals of some libertine; I must think no more about her. I was a great fool to think that so pretty a girl would have remained faithful to me, I must forget her. May she be happy."

The young man left the cottage after having given Marie-Jeanne some tokens of his liberality; he withdrew from Ermenonville, but he promised himself to come back on his return from his travels, to learn if Suzon had returned to her parents.

Gustave went directly to Italy without any remarkable adventures on the way. He arrived in the city of the Cæsars, he visited the capitol, the basilica of St. Peter's, the tombs of the popes, he found the remains of Roman grandeur still among the ruins of the temples and palaces; but he sought in vain among the inhabitants for traces of that

proud and warlike people, he saw only beggars and monks where consuls and patricians once lived.

"And these are the Romans!" said Gustave to himself, as he regarded those wan and dirty men that swarmed in the streets of the city, where many spend their whole lives with no other lodging save a niche in the wall, no other covering save a dirty and ragged cloak, no other food save macaroni boiled in water.

"Indeed, I am almost sorry that I came to Rome. I have lost here some of the illusions of my youth, and I begin to think that the sole benefit you derive from your travels is to appreciate the difference that exists between the past and the present, between dreams of the imagination and reality. It is doubtless on that account that travels make you wiser and develop your reason. I realize, indeed, that everything one sees can give rise to very philosophical reflections; a church where a circus once stood; a lottery office near the Tarpeian rock, and a Punch and Judy on the spot where the sons of Brutus perished. What would that savage republican have said if some one had predicted to him that his country would one day be that of jugglers, clowns and marionnettes?"

Gustave left Rome without regret; Benoit regretted the parades that he enjoyed as he walked about the town. Our hero visited a part of Italy, and then he travelled to Spain, Portugal, Germany, Poland and England.

Our young man had adventures everywhere; but the recital of his love affairs, which were alike wherever he went, would not interest the reader. Where the heart is not concerned, amorous relations are very monotonous. Gustave found that it was hardly necessary among the Italians to make a declaration, for those ladies saved him the trouble of doing so; and whatever may be said of the gallantry and coquetry of the Frenchwomen and of the looseness of the morals of the Parisian women, they cannot be compared to the facility with which the Italian women enter into an intrigue.

However, Gustave had the glory or perhaps the misfortune to inspire some violent passions; he carried away from Italy several stabs of the stiletto, and Benoit several declarations and proposals, which he made up his mind to ask his dear papa to explain to him on his return.

In Spain, Gustave twanged the guitar and made love through little lattices. He went to hear sermons so that he might admire the pretty women and exchange glances; he offered them holy water at the door, and the old shrews whom they call duennas and whom we call here by a very different name, followed him to his lodgings and brought him love-letters. In Spain there is more luxury and more beggary even than in Italy; extremes nearly always meet.

Benoit, who did not know that in this country mendacity is a profession and that here beggars are

people who must be answered respectfully, was unfortunate enough one day to repulse somewhat roughly a señor beggar who was asking for "caristade"; immediately a crowd of beggars assailed Benoit, he was beaten, rolled about and maltreated. Gustave, seeing his valet in the clutches of a crowd of beggars, flew at them with blows of his cane; then the affair became serious. To thrash beggars! That is an attack upon the customs, manners and privileges of the Spanish, and these people will not listen to reason about anything that touches their pride; they introduce arrogance into meannesses, self-love into child's play, and stubbornness into puerilities.

The "alguazils" arrived; they took Gustave, Benoit and the beggars before his honor the corrégidor. His honor decided that the proud rabble was in the right, and found it very hard that a one-armed man had received two blows of the stick, and he paid no attention to Benoit's broken teeth and torn ears. Gustave swore and got into a terrible passion, and his honor was about to put him in prison with his valet, but happily his wife's duenna arrived. She recognized Gustave as the handsome young fellow to whom she had rendered many services and who had paid her liberally for them. She protected him and saved him, and Gustave left Spain, disgusted with a country whose laws are made by inquisitors, monks and beggars.

In Germany our hero found the women very

amiable and their husbands great smokers. He lodged at the house of a handsome German woman who was passionately fond of waltzing, and invented a new figure every day — for in Germany when they waltz they are not satisfied with merely turning round, as we do in France. Gustave's hostess never got tired of it; she was even worse than Jean Courtepointe. Her husband played while she danced, and Benoit took lessons on the flute from the daughter of the house, a jolly fat girl who played on every instrument and could take her part in a quartet.

But the waltz tired Gustave and the flute made Benoit thin. Our hero left Germany convinced that the women excel in the dance, while Benoit was satisfied at having become a musician.

"That is a nice country," he said to his master, "without knowing any German, the women understood you at once; and as for the men! just say to them Haydn and Mozart, and they will talk to you for hours without giving you time to reply."

"Who taught you that?"

"The fat girl who showed me how to play the flute. Those are the only German words that I have learned, and even now I don't know what they mean; but when you were waltzing with the hostess, my flute-player would say to the husband, 'Haydn and Mozart'; oh, then he would take his violin and he would stop for nothing but a drink. Ah, he was a terrible musician!"

Gustave embarked for England. Benoit had himself bound to a plank during the voyage so as to be certain of keeping afloat in case of shipwreck; but they arrived without experiencing a storm. Benoit got off with having to vomit for four days in succession; when he left the ship he declared that his tongue had grown two inches longer.

A stay in great Britain is only enjoyable to a man whose chief pleasures are horse-racing, cock-fighting, betting, punch and plum puddings. A Frenchman finds it very singular to see all the women rise from the table after dessert and the men give themselves up to the gross gayety inspired by burned brandy, without regretting the departure of the fair sex, which is, on the contrary, the signal for giving themselves up to folly, if, however, the pleasure of drinking till you fall under the table can be called folly.

The young traveller thought the selection of English walks very dismal, for they have a preference for taking the fresh air and refreshing themselves from work and business in the cemeteries; in truth their cemeteries are very beautiful, and one may read on the tombstones very touching and often very original inscriptions. But you must be an Englishman to be able to take such a promenade without feeling melancholy; and that is a sentiment which is sometimes pleasant to experience, but which is dangerous to indulge in often.

Gustave noticed to what point this thoughtful

people carry their attention to little things, and the exacting usages of society.

In a brilliant circle, the young Frenchman was laughed at because, when he drank his hot tea, he poured the contents of the cup into his saucer, and because he did not put his spoon into the cup when he did not want to drink any more.

"If great geniuses are remarkable in little things," said Gustave, "then it is very certain that the English are a profound race. But I am surprised that, in the history of the Athenians and Spartans and all those Grecian people renowned for their intellect and valor, we are not told how a stranger should hold the cup that is handed to him."

Benoit quickly got used to the customs of England; he ate five meals a day, drank tea at all hours and punch as soon as it was night. He began to see his chest swell, and he learned with grief that his master wanted to leave a country where people lived so well.

The young misses were beautiful, and in England the young ladies have a great deal of liberty; they can go out alone with a young man into the country, to the play, or even to a ball without being considered improper; but once they are married — what a difference! They never leave their houses without their husbands, and they give themselves up entirely to the care of their households.

However, the society of the young Englishwomen could not make Gustave forget France.

"Do you know," he said to Benoit one day, "that we have been away for three years?"

"Three years, monsieur? My God! how tall, stout and improved my papa will find me!"

"Oh, indeed, he will not recognize you!"

"Travel has polished me very much?"

"We stayed eight months in Italy, six in Spain, a year in Germany, three months in Poland, and now for two months we have been eating beefsteaks and roast beef! I have had enough of this already. Add to this the time we have taken up in travelling, oh, indeed, we have been gone longer than three years. Pack up our boxes, Benoit; I want to go home to my uncle."

"What a pity! I am beginning to like punch so well."

During his travels, Gustave had frequently received letters from his uncle. The colonel had had a severe illness from which he had finally recovered. He always kept asking his nephew if he had found a wife; he questioned Gustave on this subject in every letter, but in this last he assured him of the pleasure he would have in seeing him again, and Gustave did not wish to defer his return any longer. Moreover, our hero was tired of running about the world. Gustave was no longer that bad lot who jumped out of windows, woke up a whole quarter and fought with the guard; he was more poised, more reasonable, and more reflective than formerly, and without ceasing to love pleasure

and beautiful women, he felt the necessity of choosing his acquaintances.

"Let us go," said Gustave to Benoit, "let us return to France. I will go back to my uncle without presenting to him the woman of my choice, but, on my life, I must confess that during my travels I haven't tried very hard to find one. Decidedly I prefer a Frenchwoman to any other. The Italians are too fiery, the Spanish too jealous, the Germans too fond of waltzing, and the English too sentimental."

"This is true, monsieur, and I declare that with the exception of the flute, the marionettes and the plum pudding, I have not seen anything remarkable in the towns that we have visited."

Gustave bade farewell to the banks of the Thames. He went on board the steam packet and soon arrived at Calais. He smiled with delight on once more setting foot on his native soil, he was wild to see his uncle and his old friends again, and Benoit was impatient to relate to his father all that he had heard, seen and admired, and very probably a great deal more besides.

CHAPTER IV

Had You Guessed It?

An announcement of Gustave's return had already been sent to his uncle; the latter had sent a tall boy of good appearance to meet him, who was dressed like a postilion and who carried a letter in his hand as he approached our hero.

"Pardon me, monsieur, but are you not M. Gustave de Saint-Réal, of Paris, the nephew of Colonel Moranval?"

"Yes, my friend; what do you want with me?" asked Gustave.

"I have been watching for your arrival, monsieur, I am sent by your uncle, Colonel Moranval; I must first give you this letter, which he commissioned me to hand to you."

"A letter from my dear uncle? Give it to me quickly."

Gustave took it and read,—

My Dear Gustave: — You must be very tired from your journey and anxious to get to Paris; in order to see you the sooner, I send Germain, my new groom, with a comfortable post-chaise. Germain will drive you, and I hope to embrace you soon.

Colonel Moranval.

"Nothing could be better," said Gustave, "and

my uncle is extremely obliging; I am tired of horseback, and, moreover, my own horse died in Germany; at least, I shall arrive in Paris like a lord. So, Germain, you have a post-chaise, then?"

"Yes, monsieur, and it is quite ready."

"That is delightful; we will start as soon as I shall have dined."

Gustave was taken by Germain to the inn where the post-chaise was, and after he had dined well he got into the carriage with Benoit, and ordered Germain to drive quickly.

"Upon my word, monsieur," said Benoit, who sat opposite to his master, "it was very kind of your uncle to send us such a nice carriage and driver. We are very comfortable and shall arrive fresh in Paris."

Gustave did not reply to Benoit; he was buried in thought, he was thinking of all the persons he had left in France, and wondering what changes three years might have wrought everywhere.

The first day the travellers only stopped for meals and to change horses. Gustave was very satisfied with Germain, who drove like the wind. The second day was drawing towards its close, it was beginning to get dark, and Gustave thought with joy that they could not be far from Paris. He put his head out of the window. It did not seem to him that they were on the high road.

"Germain, where are we?"

"About six leagues from Paris, monsieur; we are getting near Montmorency."

"Are you sure that you have taken the right road?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. I have taken a short cut which will save us a great deal."

"Suppose he should make us lose our way, monsieur!" said Benoit, anxiously.

"Why, idiot, are you frightened?"

"Damn it, monsieur! it is night — I do not see a single house."

"Do you always see houses from the high road?"

"But you said that we were no longer on the high road."

"Go to sleep, or hold your tongue!"

"Monsieur, I cannot sleep when I am frightened."

Germain drove slower; soon he stopped suddenly to speak to his master.

"Monsieur, I believe you are right, I have lost my way; I don't know this road!"

"I was sure of it!" said Gustave.

"Have we got to spend the night in the fields?" cried Benoit.

"Go along, Germain, and ask your way at the first house we come to."

"But, monsieur, the devil is in it all! One of my horses has lost a shoe, he can hardly trot, and if I continue to gallop him he will be injured."

"Good heavens!" muttered Benoit to himself, "what a fool he must be to let his horses lose their shoes. We are in a nice fix!"

Gustave did not know what to do. Germain proposed to go on a voyage of discovery; he thought he saw a light on the left, and he wanted to go and ask his way.

"If it is a house where they will take us in," said Gustave, "we will spend the night there, in case you cannot get your horse shod."

Germain went away, and soon came back to Gustave. The light that he had seen came from a very nice-looking house, where they had willingly consented to lodge the travellers.

"Let us go then and ask for their hospitality," said Gustave; "but you, Germain, you must try to get to the next village and bring back a blacksmith. I will not give up the hope of reaching Paris tonight."

"Yes, monsieur, you may depend on my best efforts."

Gustave got out of the carriage and, followed by Benoit, took his way towards the hospitable dwelling where people would be kind enough to receive them. He found a pretty house which evidently belonged to wealthy people. He knocked at the door, an old woman came to open it.

"I have been told, madame, that the master of the house is kind enough to permit me to stay here for a few moments while my carriage is repaired."

"Yes, monsieur, yes, you can enter. I will show you the way."

The servant took Gustave and Benoit upstairs

to the first floor, and opened the door of an elegantly furnished drawing-room. The master and the valet looked all around them and did not see anyone. The servant invited Gustave to sit down, and, leaving the light, went away.

"Monsieur," said Benoit, after examining each piece of furniture separately, "we are in the home of some distinguished person."

"I hope that we shall soon see the master of this dwelling, I want to thank him."

The servant returned with refreshments.

"Shall I have the pleasure of saluting your master?" Gustave asked her.

"Monsieur, it is a lady who lives in this house with her servants, she is very willing to give a lodging to travellers, but she never speaks to them nor sees them."

"What, shall I not be able to thank your mistress?"

"Oh, that is unnecessary, monsieur."

"Nor see her?"

"She does not wish to see anybody."

"That is very singular."

"Monsieur, there is some mystery in all this," Benoit whispered to his master.

Gustave was about to risk some more questions when a great noise was heard outside. Benoit gave a jump, the servant went downstairs to see what it was. Soon Germain appeared and came up to Gustave tremblingly.

"What is the matter now, Germain?"

"Ah, monsieur, you will scold me, I am very awkward. Happily it didn't happen when you were inside. After all, it wasn't my fault."

"Well, explain yourself, then."

"It was a cursed rut that I didn't see, I was leading one of my horses, and just then — crack! — the post-chaise rolled over on one side."

"What, the carriage?"

"Oh, my God, monsieur, it is ruined. A wheel gone, the axle-tree broken."

"Now we are in a nice mess," said Benoit, stamping his foot, while Gustave laughed.

"What, monsieur, does this make you laugh?"

"I was thinking of the idea my uncle had in sending Germain with a carriage in order to see me the sooner; on my life, it succeeded well. But, notwithstanding all that, where shall I spend the night?"

"Here, monsieur," said the old servant, who had been present during Germain's recital. "Your carriage will have to be repaired, you cannot continue your journey. But in this house you will lack nothing, and it will not inconvenience my mistress in the least; she charged me to tell you that you can stay here as long as you please."

"Upon my honor, your mistress is too good. Since she gives permission, I will accept her kind hospitality for the night."

"I will go to prepare your room, monsieur, and

those for your servants. You will be served with supper very soon."

The servant withdrew, and Germain followed her to put up his horses and carriage, for it was too late to go to the next village to look for workmen.

"Don't you think, Benoit, that the lady of this house is very kind?" said Gustave, as he threw himself into an armchair.

"On my life, monsieur, we are very fortunate to be in the home of such an obliging person. However, I think there is an air of mystery here."

"Which excites my curiosity, I confess. This lady who receives strangers so hospitably, and will not show herself."

"That is because she is ugly, monsieur."

"You think so? Well, I find something, I can't say just what, rather romantic in her behavior. If I were still in Italy I would see in this a love adventure. Truly we are very strange; when something is hidden from our vision, we burn to see it. I should be enchanted to see this mysterious lady."

"Wait, monsieur, somebody is coming upstairs. I can see — Ah, nothing could be better!"

"What is it, then, a beautiful woman?"

"No, monsieur, it is the supper which they have served in the next room."

"Plague on the glutton, with his supper!"

The servant entered to tell Gustave that supper

awaited him. Gustave passed into the dining-room and seated himself at a table that was elegantly served.

During supper he addressed new questions to the servant, but the latter did not seem to be a gossip; all that he could draw from her was that the mistress of the house was young and had a child.

When supper was over, the servant conducted Gustave into a pretty bedroom, and told him that his servants were sleeping just underneath him, and that he could easily call them if he had need of them.

Gustave was alone. After two days spent in a post-chaise, he should have need of rest. However, he did not feel the slightest desire to sleep. The evening was beautiful; he opened his window. The moon was just rising, and every object could be distinguished. Gustave saw from the window a portion of the gardens that belonged to the house. On the right was the main building, in which he perceived a light; doubtless these are the apartments of the lady who will not be thanked for her touching hospitality. While his glance was fastened upon the lighted window, our young man wished that he could see into the interior of the rooms, but soon he felt ashamed of his curiosity.

"What," said Gustave, "because a lady does not wish to see a stranger, I lose my head. I have created a thousand chimeras. She is a beauty! She

is a marvel! And, my God, she is probably a very ordinary woman who likes to be useful, and does not care to mix with people whom chance brings to her house. There is nothing very mysterious in that. And for a man who has just been all through Europe I am astonished at a very little matter — I who now pretend to be reasonable. Let us go to bed, that will be better than gazing at the moon and the apartments of that lady."

Gustave had just closed his window when the sound of a harp reached his ear. His curiosity gained the upper hand; he went to the window again and listened attentively. Somebody played a prelude with taste. The person who played had not very much strength perhaps, she did not surmount difficulties that astonish without charming, but she put taste and sentiment into her execution; soon a voice mingled with the sounds of the instrument, somebody sang a romance. Gustave experienced an extreme pleasure in listening to this unknown lady, for certainly it must be she, it could not be any one else, since the servant said her mistress lived in this house alone. But, alas, the song ceased, voice and harp were mute. Gustave listened again, he would have liked to have heard it forever. Never before had music aroused in him such sweet sensations.

After having listened in vain for an hour, in the hope of hearing some tones again, Gustave went to bed at last, but he was determined to know the

person who sang so well, and he went to sleep thinking of his mysterious hostess.

The next morning Gustave woke up early; he went downstairs and met the servant.

"My good woman, may I walk through the garden?"

"Yes, monsieur. Oh, you may go wherever you please."

"Is my carriage being repaired?"

"Yes, monsieur, but it will not be ready today."

"But I cannot allow myself to remain here any longer."

"Why not, monsieur?"

"It would be abusing your mistress' kindness—"

"Not at all, monsieur, she told me to beg you to stay until your carriage was in thorough repair."

"I am afraid of inconveniencing her. And since she will not receive me—"

"Ah, monsieur, there is nothing in that. It will give pleasure to madame. I will go and get your breakfast ready."

The servant went away.

"What a curious house," said Gustave, as he entered the garden; "you are treated perfectly, and yet they won't see you. Well, I may as well stay another day. Luck may come to my aid and allow me to meet this lady."

As he was walking by a flower-bed full of lovely blossoms, Gustave saw a little girl hardly three

years old; she was as pretty as a cupid and was running about in the garden all alone, gathering flowers as if for a bouquet.

"What are you doing, my dear little friend?" said Gustave, giving her a kiss.

"I am gathering flowers for mamma," replied the child, smiling.

"Where is your mamma?"

"In the house."

"Do you love her very much?"

"Yes, and my papa, too."

And her father, too! The devil! There was a reply that upset all Gustave's ideas; her father was alive, then. Why was he not with his wife? Perhaps it was on account of his absence that the lady would not receive anybody.

Gustave tried to make the child tell him more, but she was too young to express herself clearly; without replying, she escaped and regained the house.

Gustave went in to breakfast, he thought of this little girl whose charming features brought back confused memories, and of the mother's voice which had penetrated to the depths of his soul. He was sad and dreamful, he did not touch the breakfast. Benoit tried in vain to distract his master and make him talk; Benoit was forced to eat for two, but he acquitted himself well, for he had brought back from England the habit of eating all day long.

"How can I manage to see her?" finally cried Gustave, rising from the table.

"Who, monsieur?"

"Why, good heavens! the lady of the house?"

"Ah, good Lord! I have seen her, I, monsieur."

"You have seen her, you scoundrel, and you never told me?"

"Ah, when I say that I have seen her, I mean I saw her back in passing through the vestibule, and heard her tell the old woman to carry her harp into the little pavilion in the garden."

"She said that?"

"Yes, monsieur, oh, she said that."

"Good heavens! then I shall see her."

Gustave had noticed a pavilion at the end of the garden. This building had only a groundfloor, and you could see into the interior through the venetian blinds that shielded the windows. Our young man walked down the garden, he approached the pavilion and listened; nobody was there yet, but in order not to frighten the young lady by his presence he withdrew a slight distance and sat down behind a thick hedge.

Soon he heard footsteps, he parted the hedge carefully and saw through it a lady holding the little girl by the hand; but a thick veil covered part of her face, and she entered the pavilion without his having been able to distinguish her features.

Gustave went up to the pavilion, the key was in the door, it would be inconsiderate to enter, since this lady receives no one; but at least it is permissible to listen, and this is what Gustave did.

The harp sounded, a melancholy prelude was heard, then she sang a romance whose words described the sufferings of a heart far away from the loved one. Gustave listened attentively, he tried to recall where he had heard that voice that charmed him so much.

He walked all around the pavilion, he tried in vain to look through the venetian blinds, but all the windows were hung with curtains. But, oh, joy! she stopped singing to open one of the windows. Gustave went nearer, he gently parted the blinds, and his glance finally penetrated into the interior of the pavilion.

However, he was not entirely satisfied; the young lady was seated opposite to him, but her back was turned to the window, and from where he was he could not see her face.

The little girl was on her mother's knees, playing with her hair.

"Mamma, you are not singing any more; you are unhappy; you are always crying."

The young lady only replied to the little one by covering her face with kisses; then she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Gustave is trembling, he can scarcely breathe; it seems to him that it is he who has caused the tears of this young woman.

The little girl jumped off her mother's lap.

"Wait! wait!" she said; "you know how I can always stop your crying."

The child went to get a large frame that was standing on a chair and which Gustave had not noticed before; the little girl could scarcely carry this picture, because it was nearly as large as she was; however, she placed it before her mother and covered it with kisses. The young woman caught up her little girl, kissed her and made her kneel down before the portrait.

"Pray to Heaven," she said to her, "that your father may still love me, and that some day he may return to us."

Gustave was no longer master of his feelings; that voice was well-known to him; he climbed up on the window-sill in order to see the portrait also. He recognized the striking likeness; his knees shook, his tears fell. It was himself, it was indeed himself who was represented on that canvas. But, this woman!—this child! He entered the pavilion and approached, scarcely believing his eyes. It was Suzon who was before him, and who threw herself into his arms and presented him with his daughter.

He fell overwhelmed into the chair on which she had been sitting. His heart had no longer the strength to support all the emotions he was feeling.

The door of a small room opened, and Colonel Moranval appeared.

"My dear Gustave," he said, advancing gayly to his nephew, "you did well to return alone, for I have been keeping your wife and child for you."

Gustave could not speak; he held Suzon and his daughter in his arms and covered them with kisses.

"There — calm yourself," said the colonel, smiling. "You must be very impatient to know how it happens that your little peasant girl, whom you lost in Paris, should have become the lady who possesses the accomplishments and manners of good society. A few words will tell you everything. The little bootblack who established himself before the gate of my hotel was Suzon!"

"Suzon!" cried Gustave, "and I did not recognize you!"

"Ah, my dear, I was so disguised, so blackened that you could not recognize me; and I was careful to speak very little in your presence."

"And why this disguise?"

"In order to be near you, to see you every day, not to leave you —"

"Poor Suzon! how many griefs I caused you."

"It was when running away from Madame Henri's that I formed that plan; I sold and exchanged everything I possessed for the outfit of a bootblack. Alas! I was a mother. I bore within me the fruit of our affection and whenever you passed by me, I longed to throw myself into your arms and confess everything to you, but the fear of being separated from you prevented me from yielding to the impulses of my heart."

"The poor little one was afraid of me," said the

colonel; "however, I am not as terrible as I seem. Suzon followed us when we left Paris; she got up behind our carriage which was overturned at Saint-Germain. You remember, Gustave, that in order to please you I went to see how the little bootblack was. Imagine my astonishment when in the child I recognized the young girl who had interested me. I calmed Suzon's grief, for she wanted to die because you were going without her; I consoled her by giving her hope that she would see you again and I promised faithfully never to abandon her. Meanwhile, I took care to keep you out of the matter, and went back to Paris taking the little bootblack with me.

"I confess that Suzon's devotion, the strength and sincerity of her affection, her candor and youth had already made me attached to the girl. I established her in my house and looked after her education. She learned with astonishing facility, and her sole pleasure consisted in talking sometimes to me about you. She brought into the world this little girl whom I soon learned to love like her mother, for she already possessed all her sweetness and beauty. Meanwhile Suzon learned that her mother was ill, so she left everything to go to her, and I approved of her conduct. Madame Lucas died, pardoning her daughter for the fault that love had led her to commit. Suzon remained at Ermenonville; she was unwilling to leave her father, who had only her to console him. She spent eight

months in her native village; at the end of that time a malignant fever carried off the old man. I went to Ermenonville and compelled Suzon to return home with me; I had some trouble to induce her to do so, as she did not want to leave the village and her parents' tomb; but I talked to her again about you and her love prevailed.

"Finally, my dear Gustave, I appreciated more every day the virtues and amiable qualities of her whom I had taken under my protection. A severe illness would have carried me off but for Suzon's care and help. So much devotion touched my heart, and I began to wish that in your travels you might not meet with a woman who completely captivated you. I confided my views to Suzon; and you may judge of her joy. Nevertheless, she begged me not to say a word to you about her, as she wanted to leave you entirely the master of your own heart. But you may imagine with what anxiety she listened to your letters, from which she ceaselessly feared to learn that you had made a choice.

"At last you announced to me your return, and I sent Germain to meet you, instructing him to bring you here. I wanted to pique your curiosity; I know your heart, Gustave, but I tried to move it deeply so that you might appreciate all the more the great happiness that I have reserved for you. Be happy, my dear boy, I give you a charming child and an adorable wife, by whose side you won't find time pass slowly; in the first place, because

she possesses talents that embellish domestic life, and in the second, because, possessing a cultivated mind, you can converse with her on other subjects than love. Love is a charming conversation, my children, but in order always to have something to say on that subject, it must not be exhausted in the first place—and that's what you were doing during Suzon's first residence in my house."

"My dear uncle," cried Gustave, throwing his arms around the colonel's neck, "I will be constant henceforth. By the side of Suzon, yourself and my daughter I shall find the happiness I have vainly sought in the whirl of intrigue and folly."

"My boy, youth must run its course; you have sown your wild oats, so much the better, that reassures me regarding your future."

"Ah, Gustave," said Suzon, taking her lover's hand, "I could never have believed that I should be so happy. Who could have imagined when you came to the village that I should be your wife?"

"My dear child," said the colonel, as he joined the hands of the two lovers, "you have proved to me that virtue, sweetness, wit and beauty can take the place of birth and fortune."

M. MARTIN'S DONKEY

CHAPTER I

Provincial Society. Madame Valbrun

For the opening of my story, I shall take a certain evening in the year eighteen hundred and sixty-two (you see I do not go very far back for my events) on which a numerous company had gathered at Monsieur and Madame Grospré's, very highly respected and necessarily rich people, the one hardly ever goes without the other, of the little town of ——. I could tell you the name of the place, but I refrain from so doing because I think that cannot make the smallest difference to you, and if it does you must try to guess it.

M. Grospré was one of the most prominent men of the neighborhood, he had been a contractor, perhaps an architect, perhaps he had even begun as a mason or a hod-carrier, but the principal thing was that he had "got there." Do you know what a man who has "got there" is? I am going to show you if you do not know.

A man who has "got there" is some one who, if he has not made a great fortune, has at least amassed the wherewithal to live at his ease without doing anything; when you see one of your acquaintances take a house, give dinners, receive

company, entertain often, and mingle no further in business, you say to yourself, "It seems so-and-so has 'got there.'"

And from the moment that he has "got there" he takes his stand; he walks leisurely, and in conversation assumes a rather peremptory tone which sometimes borders on the impertinent, but which is everywhere taken in good part. He very rarely informs people of the way in which he "got there," for, in fact, all ways of doing so are not quite pure, quite right, or quite delicate. But if it were necessary always to get to the bottom of things, we should find much that is ugly; it is much better not to look too closely into them.

M. Grospré was a jolly fellow of some fifty-five years; he was tall and stout, built like a Hercules; in fact, he was what is ordinarily called a "solid" man. He was neither handsome nor ugly, but his great height and his athletic figure had won him no little favor with the ladies; there are ladies who have a great liking for tall, herculean men, forgetful that appearances are often deceitful — but that is their business, it has nothing to do with us.

M. Grospré had been only too happy to make conquests by means of his height, for he never could have made them by his wit, of which commodity he was entirely destitute. But wit is not necessary in order to "get there," we have proof of that every day; there is a kind of wit often possessed by fools which consists in knowing how to make

money, and which is a great deal more common than the other kind of wit.

We do not pretend to say either that it is absolutely necessary to be stupid in order to make one's fortune; no, thank heaven! besides, Voltaire and Beaumarchais will always contradict such an idea as that.

Let us pass on to Madame Grospré, who was at least ten years younger than her husband, who was hardly possessed of more wit than he, but who had been rather pretty; one of those irregular faces which are pleasing at sixteen, but which are no longer so at forty, the owners of which are continually indulging in slight smiles, little sly oglings, slight sighs; who are at times taken with sentimental yearnings which embarrass you, and who give languorous looks which are only too easily understood.

Phœbe, which was the baptismal name of this lady, was a pure-blooded Parisian; but in Paris there are so many pretty faces, the owners of which are so graceful, so witty, so attractive, that Phœbe with her irregular face and her sometimes saucy, sometimes languorous looks, did not produce much effect; and it was from vexation at not attracting sufficient attention in the Parisian world that she had consented to marry the contractor Grospré, who, in one of his visits to the capital, had met the young lady and found that she had a good round sum as her dowry.

The fine man had seen nothing more in the marriage than a matter of business and a way of accelerating his fortunes. Mademoiselle Phœbe, too, had consented to live in a little provincial town, because there, she flattered herself, she would have no rivals in either dress or charms. Perhaps the herculean form of her future husband had had something to do with her determination. But during the eight years she had been married Madame Grospré had often repeated with sighs, "One is very wrong to judge from appearances."

You have now made the acquaintance of the Grosprés and we will pass on to the others. First, M. Liroquet, an old bachelor in the fifties, who was always saying that he was going to marry, although he had no desire to do so; but it was a rather clever way of making himself welcomed in houses where they had young ladies to settle. For the rest, he was very agreeable in society, joining in all the games, but preferring those where they gave forfeits or where they kissed.

Madame Rifflard was the widow of her fourth husband, and, despite the fact that she was in her fifties, would willingly have married for the fifth time had a man sufficiently courageous to make such a proposition presented himself; but he did not present himself.

Monsieur and Madame Postulant, a middle-aged couple. M. Postulant was a pharmacist with a pretension of being also a physician and of having

cured more people, with an elixir he had invented, than had the doctor of the neighborhood with his prescriptions.

Madame Postulant was very ugly; she was no fool, but she talked evil about everybody, even persons she had never seen were not safe from the venom of her tongue, so you may imagine what she said about her friends. She was, moreover, very pretentious in her conversation.

M. Boulingrin, a former notary, a very good man, who let everybody else talk and asked but one thing to be happy, and that was to be able, every evening, to have his game of whist or piquet, or backgammon, or draughts, or even dominos; provided that he could play, it little mattered to him what other people did.

M. Boulingrin had a niece of twenty years, Mademoiselle Mignonette, who was pleasing, gay, always laughing, but very curious and altogether too talkative for a young girl; it is a defect which may be tolerated in old women, but which displeases people in a young girl.

Monsieur and Madame Breillet, a young married couple who adored each other and passed their time in quarrelling and making up again, which led sometimes to scenes of an intimate nature which were rather embarrassing to those who witnessed them.

Arthur Breillet traded in wines, but by the wholesale on a very large scale indeed, as his wife was

careful to inform everybody. The latter busied herself only with dress, millinery and finery. She was a subscriber to all the little pink or green journals in Paris which treated exhaustively of the cut of a dress, and sent their patrons fashion plates with the addresses of the most fashionable dressmakers and milliners.

Finally, Madame de Beaurivage, a former marchioness or countess, nobody knew exactly which; but this lady must have been very noble, according to what she said, for her ancestry, if she were to be believed, went back as far as Godefroi de Bouillon. She had experienced great reverses, her parents, who were French, had emigrated, and she could not say precisely of what country she was a native, for she was born on the ship which transported them to England. Was she French? or was she English? That is a question I leave you to decide.

But M. Monfignon, poet of the little town in which this lady had fixed her residence, had not failed to compare her to Venus, because she was the daughter of the sea. Madame Beaurivage had thought the idea very correct, and she believed herself a member of the family of Cypria and Cupid. Unfortunately, in growing old this lady had become very deaf, which sometimes rendered her very compromising in company.

Add to these the poet we mentioned awhile back, an independent man of middle age who had for

some twelve years past been working at a comedy of manners, of which he could never manage to develop the denouement; and, following him, two young men employed at the mairie, of whom one was continually admiring himself and examining his well-made trousers; while the other, infinitely brighter, dreamed of nothing but dinners, balls and suppers — and you will have a very correct idea of the company which on a certain evening had met at M. Grospré's, as I had the honor of telling you in the beginning of this chapter.

We thought we had made you acquainted with the company assembled at M. Grospré's, and yet we have not spoken of the person who might be regarded as the most interesting and agreeable individual at the party. You will say, perhaps, that that proves nothing in her favor, since the portraits that we have drawn are not in the least flattering.

The young lady in question was really good-looking; she was not, however, a beauty; but is it, then, necessary to have regular features, an irreproachable nose and mouth and teeth, for people to think one good-looking? No, for with the most handsome Greek profile, the most correct nose and the best-shaped mouth a woman may leave us cold and not evoke the slightest emotion; while the fact that one thinks a person good-looking proves at once that she pleases; and what is necessary in order to please? Sometimes it is a way of smiling,

often it is the expression of a glance; the finest eyes are not always the most expressive; one may be seduced by the gentleness of the features or the charm of a voice. But I do not know why I tell you all this — it is probable that you know it all as well as I do.

Madame Valbrun was twenty-six — which is a very pretty age for a woman — it is not disagreeable in a man — but what a difference! at twenty-six years of age a man is still quite heedless and quite foolish; he thinks of nothing but pleasure; he loves all women, would have a hundred mistresses if his means did but allow him. You will tell me there are young men who are virtuous, constant and faithful, but these are exceptions, and you know that the exception proves the rule; between ourselves, I am not quite certain why it should, and for my part, I should much prefer a rule without an exception, but, in fact, this is recognized as a proof.

To return to women of twenty-six, I repeat: What a difference between them and men of the same age; at twenty-six a woman is sensible, or she never will be. Then alone she knows her heart, she does not give it easily, her love is no longer capricious; that is, of course, supposing she is capable of loving, for there are many women who have never known what love is, and they, for the most part, are the ones who have the greatest number of love affairs. Perhaps they are always in search of this love which they never manage to experience.

Clémentine Valbrun was of middle height, but she was well-made; there was grace in her carriage, in her slightest movement, and she was guiltless of crinoline. Do you hear that, mesdames? you who fortify yourselves in these hoops and from a distance look like funnels upside down. I am very sorry if I displease you in saying this, but I assure you I speak in your interest, and there are very few men who would not be of my opinion. Look you, did you not provoke admiration before you wore crinolines? Did you not make conquests? Why, yes, just as many as you do now. Then of what use is it for you to inflate yourselves after that fashion?

Ah, I can hear you answer me, "Women with good figures can do without them, but those who have not good figures, who have no gracious curves — can't." I take it from this declaration that all women who wear crinolines are built like broom handles.

But you say to me again, "Your Madame Valbrun, with her charming carriage, doubtless wore several starched petticoats!" As to that, I don't know how to answer you; I have not even counted the number of petticoats worn by that lady — which I deeply regret. But I am not waging war against petticoats — at least they do not hurt our legs when we sit beside you at the play or in an omnibus.

Clémentine was brown-haired and brown-eyed. I shall not detail the size or the shape of her nose; I shall only tell you that her mouth was serious,

but that her smile made her charming though she smiled but rarely, her expression being cold and sometimes rather melancholy.

And why was she melancholy? do you say? I will tell you at once, as the best thing I can do.

Clémentine, born in Paris and brought up in that city by a mother who had early been left a widow, and who adored her only daughter, had attained the age of eighteen without having experienced the slightest grief, the slightest vexation. Her mother's fortune was sufficient for two women whose tastes were simple, their pleasures modest, and who did not care to occupy a stage box every time they went to the theatre.

Madame Darbelle, Clémentine's mother, was desirous of seeing her daughter married, but left her entirely free to follow her own taste in her choice of a husband, well assured that her daughter would not misplace her affections. Clémentine was in no hurry to take a husband; she was entirely happy with her mother and very reasonably said to herself, "The happiness that one has is always better than that which one hopes for."

Several aspirants for her hand presented themselves, but they did not suit Clémentine, who, as the first condition of her marriage, declared that no one should separate her from her mother.

There are some men who do not care to have a mother-in-law near them to control their slightest actions—to put the wife in the right when she is

in the wrong, and to put the husband in the wrong when he is in the right. Really, these men are very ridiculous.

At length a young man presented himself who was very steady, very gentlemanly, very reasonable, who had been brought up like a girl and had never committed the slightest folly or had the very tiniest intrigue, and who would have accepted a half-dozen of mothers-in-law had they been imposed upon him.

Edouard Valbrun was, moreover, a very handsome fellow, who was never at a loss when with women. He pleased Clémentine, above all by his shy, virtuous and reserved expression, and by the respect and submission he showed towards Madame Darbelle; the young girl said to herself,—

"With such a husband as that I could be happy; he will be faithful to me, his tastes are as simple as mine, he likes to be with my mother; he is neither heedless nor fatuous, nor is he one of those who deceive and seduce women, as the greater part of the young men who have paid me court make a parade of doing, nor do they blush as they boast of their conquests. I will marry Edouard Valbrun."

So at the age of nineteen, Clémentine had become Madame Valbrun. Eighteen months after her marriage she lost her mother; a year later the husband — so good and virtuous! — began to be wild and left his wife to run after dancers on the stage, then after actresses, then after the ballet-

dancers of the opera, and finally fought a duel and was killed for having dared to assert that his particular ballet-dancer lifted her leg higher than the famous Rigolboche.

O times! O manners! Marry, I warn you, a young man who dare not look a woman in the face and at the end of three years of domestic felicity he will commit as many follies as the greatest roué of the Regency.

Clémentine was, then, completely disillusioned; she wept her husband's death, but the cause of that death prevented her grief from being long-lived, for really one cannot long regret a husband who is killed on account of his mistress — and for a step of the can-can!

But if the young widow's tears for her husband were soon dried, she still maintained the profoundest regret for her lost illusions; all that she had dreamed, all her ideas of love, on the union of their two hearts, all her plans for the future, had vanished like a house of cards at a breath of wind. From that time on she had worn a serious expression, and this young woman, deceived by a man whom she had thought a model of virtue and reason, had now the worst opinion of men, judging the whole piece by the sample, which happens often enough.

The young widow possessed ten thousand francs income, and wished for nothing further; her tastes were limited, her dress was elegantly simple, she

was still rich enough to be able to help those less fortunate than herself, and this was her greatest pleasure. As to remarrying, we may easily imagine that Clémentine had vowed to have nothing to do with marriage, and, frankly speaking, her experience had been such that one may easily understand that she was not likely to be tempted to bind herself again. Had she also vowed not to love again? It is not probable; she had too much mind to form such an idea as that — and at six and twenty that would have been to fling a black crape veil over her future.

Clémentine's mother had been a cousin of Madame Grospré. When the latter learned that her cousin's daughter was a widow, she had invited her to come and spend some time in their little town, that she might have distraction, change of air, and taste the peaceful pleasures and calm and tranquillity of provincial life.

The promise of a quiet and peaceable existence had enticed Clémentine, who had once before left Paris to live in the country and had not found, in the midst of peasants, that peaceful existence which she so much desired to experience. At length, one fine day, Clémentine yielded to the insistence of her cousin and left the city for the country, saying,—

"I will go and enjoy for a short time the tranquil life and simple pleasures of the provincials, who are, perhaps, better than simple rustics, and

if I like it better than Paris there is nothing to prevent my settling myself there."

And for a fortnight Madame Valbrun had been living at the Grosprés', who possessed a very fine house in which they could easily lodge the friends who came from Paris to visit them.

CHAPTER II

The Tittle-tattle of a Small Town. The Poet Monfignon

Picard wrote "La Petite Ville," which is one of his prettiest plays, because it is so exceedingly true to nature and because he has not overdrawn the picture in any way. He only wrote four short acts. One might make an enormous quantity on the habits, the ridiculous customs, the prejudices, the gossip and tittle-tattle and manners of the inhabitants of a small town. But on the stage too much must not be said, the action must speak for itself; that Picard has done, he has done well. One runs less risk in taking only the cream of a subject. In a book one may expatiate on it and say all that he wishes.

Saturday was the Grosprés' reception day; they then gathered around them, in the evening, the flower of the society of the neighborhood. They played different games, they talked, told the news of the day, which was, in fact, their principal occupation.

Indeed, although there was a piano in the drawing-room, they very rarely had music; in the first place, because very few of the dwellers in this modest

little town knew how to play that instrument; and, in the second, because these people would much rather entertain each other with tittle-tattle, the gossip that was current in the neighborhood, than listen to one of Schubert's romances or fantasies. Oh, the barbarians, not to love, not to appreciate music; that alone should suffice to determine their quality.

Clémentine, on the other hand, was very fond of music; she played the piano very well indeed, and her sweet voice, correct as it was sweet, sounded very agreeable in song. In the first days of her arrival, Madame Grospré, who had been pleased to show off her cousin from Paris, and who had made her out immediately as possessed of twenty thousand francs income, and as great a singer as Alboni, had not failed to beg Clémentine to seat herself at the piano. The latter had consented to do so, thinking it would be agreeable to the company. The first piece she played had been listened to attentively enough, except that some murmurings escaped Madame Rifflard, and an extremely obstinate cough troubled Madame Postulant; but at the second song she essayed the young woman's voice was almost entirely overpowered by the conversation and whisperings of the company, so she omitted the last two couplets and hastily left the piano, vowing that she would not sit down to it again except when there was nobody in the room, although a concert of applause had burst

forth when she returned to her place; but she could say, with reason, "They applaud because they are delighted that I have finished."

On this especial evening Clémentine had not yet come down to the drawing-room from her chamber, to which she had withdrawn immediately after dinner, on learning there was to be a reception, to make a fresh toilet, for she had noticed that her cousin liked everything elegant about her, and that Madame Grospré herself liked to be dressed so as to be noticeable, and of course a lady who came from Paris would have been unpardonable had she not worn the very latest fashions.

The young widow had, during the first days of her visit, been very much attracted by the beautiful, well-kept garden which was a part of her cousin's property. Gardens are rare in Paris; it is true that the squares are now laid out to gratify our eyes and refresh our sight after the dusty streets; they furnish a very pleasant promenading space for the nurses and children, but they cannot replace a garden of one's very own where one is free and at home, without confronting a blackguardly little street urchin or a private soldier, and where there are no children to throw their balls at one's legs or the tails of their kites in one's face.

Clémentine, therefore, passed a great part of her day in the garden, when the weather permitted; she was not long in perceiving that it was there only that she could taste the delights of a calm and

tranquil life; for if the streets of the little town were guiltless of the incessant roar and rattle of the carriages which deafen you in Paris, on the other hand, there was a continual din of voices in her cousin's house, where each member of the household seemed to try who could speak longest and loudest.

The Grospré couple for some time past had not been living in complete harmony; monsieur reproached madame with the excessive expenses that she lavished upon her toilet and her subscriptions to the Parisian fashion journals. Madame called her husband a false Hercules, and asserted that he had not the strength to uncork a bottle of bordeaux. These little dissensions which took place in the privacy of domestic life were hidden in company, or at least were replaced by stinging words from madame and sulky looks from monsieur.

A servant whom they had had for fifteen years, and who called herself a first-class cook because she put fried croutons on her spinach, also served as madame's maid, and pouted when they asked more than three persons to dinner.

M. Grospré had a valet who polished the floors, blacked the boots, beat the coats, and washed the plates and silver on gala days; and, lastly, a deaf old peasant had charge of the garden and also acted as porter, though his infirmity caused him to leave people who had called on his master or mistress waiting for an unconscionable time.

But when madame scolded her servant, monsieur hastened to do the same by his valet, to show that he had as much right to shout as had his wife, and the deaf gardener, thinking that they were calling him, cried at the top of his voice, —

" I'll be there in a minute, I can't be everywhere at once."

These little shouting contests made a great part of the peaceable existence they tasted at the house of the Grosprés.

At the Saturday reunions and at the other gatherings where their cousin had been presented, scandal had almost constantly furnished the theme of conversation, which had sometimes even been tinctured by calumny; it always seemed to be essential to make fun of the absent, find fault with one's friends, and ridicule one's acquaintances.

This manner of amusing one's self was not at all to Clémentine's taste; she could laugh heartily at a clever witticism, but did not take the slightest pleasure in constantly hearing evil spoken of everybody, even of people to whom they all, later on, paid the most extravagant compliments and made the most earnest protestations of friendship.

" These people are falser and more malicious than any in Paris," said the young widow to herself, " and if it were not for this delightful garden, which affords me a great deal of pleasure, I think I should be quite ready to give up the quiet and pleasant life of the province."

"Is your cousin indisposed, that we do not see her?" demanded M. Liroquet, who had just entered the Grosprés' drawing-room.

"No, she hasn't come down yet, she is still dressing. A Parisian lady, you may be sure, cannot dress as quickly as our provincial dames."

"In any event," said M. Postulant, "I doubt if Madame Valbrun can take longer to do her hair than the assistant mayor's wife. I called for her the day before yesterday, with my wife, to go with her to the notary's party, she had but to put on her bonnet, she told us, and she kept us waiting half an hour for that."

"Three-quarters of an hour, my dear; I am positive we were waiting fully three-quarters of an hour."

"It is possible, I know it became very annoying."

"Are we not going to have a rubber?" said M. Boulingrin, turning about in his armchair.

"Presently, neighbor, it is not yet late; M. Monfignon will be here and he will make the fourth at a game of whist."

"I like whist much better played with three and a dummy; they say that it is the fashion now in Paris to play with three."

"Thank you, I don't intend to play as partner to a dummy; one has to pay double when one loses! I don't think that at all amusing."

"Is your cousin going to give us some music

this evening?" asked Madame de Beaurivage; "she refused to sing yesterday at Madame Rifflard's, although they begged her to do so again and again!"

"Ah, those Parisian dames, you know, are not always disposed to do what is asked of them!"

"I think her a little capricious," resumed the pharmacist's lady; "before I could judge of her talent I should have to hear her play the overture to 'Guillaume Tell.'"

"Or to the 'Caravane,'" said Grospré.

"Ah, fie for shame! what are you saying there, M. Grospré? The overture to the 'Caravane,'" exclaimed Mademoiselle Mignonette laughing. "That is only played now on the street organs, and then, it is only popular music."

"By Jove, mademoiselle, I've seen that opera played at Bordeaux, I thought it fine! It's true that that was a long time ago."

"Ah, that must have been when you were as strong as a Turk," said Madame Grospré mockingly.

"Well, are we not going to play, then?" resumed the former notary, stifling a slight yawn.

"One minute, neighbor. Why what a gambler this Boulingrin is! he would play—with his head under water. Did you like to play just as much when you were a notary?"

"Why shouldn't I—so long as I neither gambled at the Bourse nor at roulette—"

"Nor at lansquenet!" said Madame Breillet.

"That is a game that should not be tolerated at decent gatherings. They played it, however, at Madame Pigache's last party."

"Yes, and played devilishly high, as I have reason to remember," said M. Postulant. "I lost fifty-eight sous there."

"And who was it set the game going?"

"By Jove! that's an unnecessary question! It was M. Frémont, who, since he has been to Paris, makes such a fuss, kicks up such a dust, that one is really sorry for him."

"What did he go to Paris for?"

"What, indeed! does anybody know?"

"Yes, I know!" said one of the clerks from the mairie. "He went to get a share he had won at the last drawing of the debentures of the Credit Foncier."

"Really! he won a share? — there are some people who have insolent luck! And how much was his share?"

"I believe it was fifty thousand francs; but as his debenture was five hundred francs, he had a right to only half the share — twenty-five thousand francs."

"That's handsome enough — but is no reason for his forcing us to play lansquenet."

"And to cause me to lose fifty-eight sous, I who had won no share!"

"That's nothing — that isn't, they had some sweeps of twelve francs!"

"If they play like that at Madame Pigache's I won't set my foot in her house again — I don't frequent gambling dens."

"Twenty-five thousand francs — Oh, if I had only won it!" said the clerk who was always admiring himself.

"Well, what would you do, M. Sautrond?"

"Madame, I should go straight to Paris and have myself completely clothed by Dusautoy!"

"Oh, these young men! they are as vain as the women."

"Madame, there's no law against liking to be fashionably clad."

"No, of course not — but you are always very well-dressed, M. Sautrond."

"Madame, it seems to me every one ought to be so who has the advantage of being received in good society."

"One may be well-dressed without being pretentious!" exclaimed the clerk who was a lover of good living. "I don't myself pass half an hour in tying a knot in my cravat."

"Was that a hit at me, Dupétral?"

"Take it to yourself, if the cap fits you."

"I think your observation rather an unusual one — and I might even say an unconventional one."

"I think it hits the mark myself, and I shall not withdraw it, as they say in the Chamber."

"Come, come, you are not going to get angry,

messieurs — over a knot in a cravat, are you? two friends — two confrères, one may say, for you are both employed at the mairie. Tell us something of M. Martin, that would be much better; has anything further been heard of that mysterious personage?"

"I know nothing at all about him, madame."

"I met him yesterday walking in the town, he had stopped and seemed to be lost in contemplation."

"In contemplation of what?"

"By Jove! I saw nothing there but a haystack, I don't know if that was what had rendered him motionless."

"In contemplation before a haystack? I begin to think the man must be crazy."

"He has a bee in his bonnet," said Dupétral.

"Oh, how funny! Dupétral, you are the only one who would say such a thing as that. A bee in his bonnet! did you hear that, mesdames?"

"Yes," answered Madame Postulant, "but before laughing at it I must first understand what it means."

"I heard that said in Paris, madame, on the stage; I don't remember whether it was at the Vaudeville or at the Délassements. One who has a bee in his bonnet is understood to be cracked — out of his mind."

"I should never have guessed it."

"Look you, as we can't make up a game of

whist, Grospré, I propose that we play piquet à écrire.[1]"

"Piquet by all means, but not piquet à écrire, that mixes me all up. I'd rather have a hundred, ready money."

"Really, your cousin takes a good while to dress," said Madame Rifflard.

"She's not coming down, perhaps," remarked Madame de Beaurivage.

"Oh, well, we can dispense with her company."

"Oh, she is certainly coming down."

"She never looks as though she were enjoying herself in company, haven't you noticed that, Postulant?"

"Yes, she has a serious expression."

"All the same she is a pretty woman!" said M. Breillet.

"Pretty! — what is there pretty about her? Tell me what feature is so remarkable?" exclaimed that gentleman's wife.

"She has twenty thousand francs income," said young Sautrond. "That in itself is a fortune."

"That is her most beautiful feature."

"That is a fine match — a pretty widow to console. You ought to pay court to her, M. Sautrond."

"Oh, madame, I don't believe the lady has any desire to remarry."

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[1] Piquet à écrire is played by two persons, the losses being scored on a sheet of paper and reckoned and settled for at end of game.

"Has she told you so?"

"Not positively, but—she looks so serious that one would not dare to pay her a compliment."

"I dared to, all the same," said Dupétral, "and the lady did not appear offended at my compliments."

"By Jove! I shall pay court to her, also," said old Liroquet, "and if she will only listen to me, this time I am done for, enslaved!"

"Look at this waxed old duffer, who imagines she'll listen to him," said Dupétral in a low tone, turning towards his fellow-clerk, who was gazing into a mirror.

"One thing is quite certain," said Madame Grospré, "and that is that my cousin must remarry, and I wish her to choose some one in our town, if it is only to aggravate her admirers in Paris."

"Is this lady possessed of much wit?" demanded the Widow Rifflard.

"Why, yes, she is supposed to have a great deal, in Paris."

"Then she must have left it in Paris," said Madame Postulant, "for I have not caught a single witty word in her conversation."

"And for a Parisian," added Mademoiselle Mignonette, "I don't find anything remarkable in her dress or her way of doing her hair."

At this moment one of the doors opened and the person of whom they were speaking came into the drawing-room.

Immediately every one went towards her, and nothing was heard but such phrases as these,—

"Here she is, the dear lady!"—"We've been so impatient for you to come."—"The party would have been so dull without you!"—"What a charming gown — but you are always well-dressed."—"And your hair is done so tastefully."—"Ah, they may well say only in Paris do they know how to dress."—"Really, you are charming this evening."

Madame Valbrun responded to all of these compliments rather coldly, and was about to seat herself beside her cousin when a new personage arrived, whose entrance made quite a sensation in the gathering.

This was a little man of forty-five years, stout, fresh, rosy, even, with a fox's face, goggle eyes, which always seemed to be looking for something, and a stereotyped, mocking smile on his countenance; this gentleman had had a quantity of light hair, but had now lost nearly all of it in front; he carefully trained and pomatumed over his cranium the few strands that remained above his ears. When this comical personage had the imprudence to remain in the air without his hat, or to take part in the exercise of dancing, the little wisps of hair which he had so carefully trained over his bald crown became detached and flew to right and left, giving to his head something of the appearance of a dusting-brush.

This individual was M. Monfignon, the poet,

who had been working for twelve years on a comedy of manners, and who had compared Madame de Beaurivage to Venus rising from the deep. But poetry did not entirely occupy this gentleman's leisure; he loved to hold an audience at a gathering, and to be cited for his amiability; but as, to amuse his audience, he must ordinarily have something new to tell them, the poet Monfignon tried to be the first to learn the news of the little town. He carefully informed himself of everything that everybody said or did; in fact, if an intrigue was formed, a quarrel took place, or a stranger arrived in the neighborhood, he knew it before everybody else, and hastened to go and tell it to his acquaintances. In short, M. Monfignon was, therefore, a very precious man and very much sought after in society.

This time he came in looking radiant, triumphant; he bowed to every one and rubbed his hands as he exclaimed,—

"I know something new; oh, I've learned something good. It's comical, very comical indeed."

All ears were open and every one turned towards him, exclaiming,—

"Come, M. Monfignon! tell us what you know that is new. What a delightful man! to be so thoroughly up in everything that is going on."

"Is it about M. Martin that you've learned something?"

"Precisely! it relates to the mysterious Martin."

"Do tell us, we are all listening."

M. Monfignon seated himself in the midst of the circle; he used his handkerchief, coughed, pulled out his snuff-box, took a pinch, looked to the right and left to observe all the persons who were in the drawing-room, then, drawing himself up like an advocate about to plead, commenced at length,—

"I must tell you, mesdames and messieurs, that this morning, that is to say between eleven o'clock and twelve — it was nearer noon than eleven — after having well breakfasted on the wing of a fowl and a cup of chocolate — "

"Do you take chocolate?" interrogated M. Postulant, "that is not nearly so good for the digestion as coffee."

"Ah, M. Postulant," cried Madame Grospré, "please don't interrupt."

"Yes, I take chocolate, it sets me up — with cream. I had done breakfast, and was going out to take the air — thinking, as usual, of my comedy. I believe I have found a denouement — or, at any rate, am on the point of doing so. My young person refuses to marry because her suitor has a false wig, which drops off at the moment of signing the contract. Hey! what do you say to that? It seems to me that will be a new effect on the stage, and it is logical, because a man who makes use of anything artificial may carry it very far."

"Oh, M. Monfignon, and the news concerning M. Martin."

"That's right; I'm coming to it. I had turned my steps in the direction of that isolated house, situated almost outside the town — one might almost say it was in the country, and which has been rented by this singular individual who came here about six weeks ago, and who has taken the name of Martin. Notice what I say, 'taken the name,' for I have many reasons for believing that it is not really his own."

"What makes you think that, Monfignon?" demanded M. Liroquet.

"I will tell you later on — there is a very ingenious method which I have employed more than once — I often have ingenious ideas — "

"M. Liroquet, you interrupted our story-teller. You made him leave his subject."

"I'll go back to it, madame; I'll go back to it. I had, then, directed my walk towards the house occupied by this — let us still say Martin; I did so of set purpose, for they assert that people go into this gentleman's house who are never seen to come out of it."

"Really! What does he do with them then?"

"I was not aware of this peculiarity of that singular personage," said Madame Rifflard; "really, it is enough to make one shiver — if one had not had four husbands."

"Yes," muttered young Dupétral; "but when one has outlived four husbands one should be afraid of nothing."

"The house is totally removed from all other dwellings. The nearest to it is M. Frémont's; it was M. Frémont who rented the lonely house from the grocer Girard, who is the proprietor of it, saying that it was for some one from Paris who was coming to the country to re-establish his health."

"This Martin doesn't look at all like an invalid."

"Do you think not? I think his skin is very yellow," said Madame Breillet.

"As if any one could see his complexion with that great beard which nearly covers the whole of his face!" exclaimed Madame Postulant.

"That is true; he wears a full beard and mustache — just like the brigands I have seen at the theatres in 'la Forêt périlleuse.' Oh, what a delightful play; it gave me the most frightful dreams."

"I don't know it; is it a tragedy?"

"No, it is a melodrama. There is an underground cave in which a woman is shut up with a band of scoundrels, who have not even pinched the end of one of her fingers."

"They are not double-dyed scoundrels, then!"

"When these ladies have done, I will continue," said the poet Monfignon, with some vexation.

"Go on, my dear fellow! we are listening, no one shall breathe a word."

CHAPTER III

Forfeits. Monsieur Martin's Donkey

"As I was saying, then—but where was I? You can readily understand that when one is so constantly interrupted as I am, one is apt to lose the thread of his discourse."

"That is correct," said Madame Grospré, "and I propose that the first person who interrupts you shall pay a forfeit, or any one else who makes a single observation before you have done."

"Bravo! approved!"

"Yes, yes; a forfeit?"

"But what shall the forfeit be?"

"It must be large enough to frighten chatterers."

"I propose twenty-five centimes, which later on will be put to such use as may be suitable."

"Twenty-five centimes! that's a good deal."

"No, it will do very well; those who don't want to pay it must hold their tongues."

"The twenty-five centimes is adopted."

"The incident is closed, and M. Monfignon has the floor."

We need scarcely say that Madame Valbrun took no part in all these discussions and chatterings. She listened in silence and kept to herself

any reflections that may have been evoked by what she heard.

M. Monfignon blew his nose again, cleared his throat again, and took snuff. He seemed for a moment or two overcome by a desire to sneeze — but he did not sneeze. He resumed his talk.

"Arrived in front of the house of our mysterious personage, I attentively examined —"

"He was there, then?"

"Ah, a forfeit, M. Liroquet — a forfeit!"

"Allow me to speak! Monsieur said, 'I attentively examined!' was he speaking of the mysterious personage? or of the house? for indeed I must know what to hold to, or I can't understand later on —"

"Monsieur, had you not interrupted, you would have known what I was talking about — you would have been settled. It occurs to me that I am usually able to make myself understood, that I can say what I have to say without being diffuse."

"Yes, yes, a forfeit, M. Liroquet!"

"Give your twenty-five centimes; perform your sentence."

"It is unjust — I assert it to be most unjust; it's not on account of the twenty-five centimes — I am above that! Why, I had a right to ask to be enlightened."

"What! we make a law and you break it immediately."

"As for that, these things happen every day."

"Give your twenty-five centimes, why don't you, my dear fellow? and that would end it."

M. Liroquet decided regretfully to pay the forfeit; he fumbled in the left pocket of his waistcoat, then in the right pocket, then in his trousers pocket and then in his coat; at length he found his pocket-book, but having looked in it for a long time without opening it too wide he said,—

"I have nothing but gold; can anyone change twenty francs for me?"

The company, tired of the time this gentleman had wasted in his search, cried with one voice,—

"No, no, you can pay later on. M. Monfignon, will you continue, you see we make them keep the rule we have established!"

"I see, and I see also that if there is a repetition of this you will learn nothing this evening, and that will be so much the worse for you."

"Hush! hush! hush!"

"I had, then, arrived in front of our mysterious individual's dwelling. The house was very nice-looking outside; it was composed of a groundfloor, a first floor and attics. Four windows on the first floor, three on the groundfloor as well as the door; behind it is a small garden enclosed with a wall which has a small entrance on to a path shaded by elders."

"We know all that!" muttered Postulant; suddenly he remembered the forfeit, and immediately begun to cough as though he had the quinsy, and

when Madame Grospré cried, "Who was it that spoke?" M. Postulant answered, "Nobody, I only coughed; it's not forbidden to have a cold, is it?"

M. Monfignon went on, "I noticed that all the windows on the groundfloor were closed, which appeared very singular to me, for usually at noon people like plenty of light in the house. I said to myself, 'Here's a man who fears the light, that is evident; and in general people who fear the broad daylight are not what they ought to be.' I looked up at the first floor; there the venetian shutters were open and I perceived that one of the windows was not closed. I involuntarily turned my steps towards that side, and when I came under the window I could hear them talking on the first floor. Immediately I glued myself to the wall and listened. At first I heard only vague words which had no sequence, but at length I distinguished this phrase, which I immediately wrote in my diary for fear of forgetting it; here is the sentence as I put it, 'He must make an end of it—he came to stay in this little town with that intention only; and, besides, the sum of which he has need is considerable.'"

"He's a robber!" cried all the ladies spontaneously, for this time they could not refrain from expressing their thought.

"A forfeit for all the ladies!" said M. Liroquet then; "they've interrupted monsieur."

"Pardon me, M. Liroquet," said the mistress

of the house, " the case is entirely different — this is a question of grave interest which concerns the safety of our property. The word which escaped us is quite natural ! "

" Madame, all the words that escape us are as a rule very natural; you have broken the rule, nevertheless, you each owe five sous."

" We will not pay them ! "

" No, we certainly will not pay them ! "

" Just as you like ; but, in that case, you may be quite certain that I shall not pay mine either."

" Oh, that is how you want to get out of it ! "

" I'll make madame, your cousin from Paris, the judge ; she is the only lady here who has not said anything. Speak, madame, am I wrong on this occasion."

" Good heavens, monsieur," answered Madame Valbrun, " I am hardly competent to judge between you ; however, if you ask my opinion, I think these ladies are rather hasty in deciding that this M. Martin is a thief from the words monsieur heard."

All the ladies looked at each other and seemed to take it ill that the pretty widow should hold an opinion contrary to theirs. M. Monfignon exclaimed,—

" Pardon me, madame, I did not say this gentleman was a thief ; I only reported what I had heard."

" That's all right, Monfignon — that is a mere detail. Besides, my cousin does not know, as we do, what this M. Martin is, and in what a peculiar

I was raising my face when suddenly I received on my head the contents of a washbowl.

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way he has conducted himself since he has been in our neighborhood; we will tell her all about it presently. Please resume your interesting narration — we will restrain our emotions, we will be mute."

"I had caught and recorded this phrase; I still listened, but the voices, for there were two of them, had lowered their tone. It seemed to me even that they were whispering very low and I was raising my face when suddenly I received on my head the contents of a washbowl — do you understand? Fortunately it was but soapy water and rose-scented at that, which did not prevent my exclaiming violently, 'Confound it, be careful; you might at least call, "Look out there."' Then a voice answered me rather mockingly, 'And what were you doing there, glued against the wall?' 'What was I doing, hang it! I was taking a walk.' 'People don't flatten themselves against houses when they go out walking. You are a——.' I know not what epithet they addressed to me, I had already turned back, for I felt my anger rising, and when I am angry I don't know what I am doing — I go too far! However, I did not want to depart from the house, for I was curious to see those I had heard. I said to myself, 'Some one may come out, but if they do it will probably be by the little garden gate which leads into the lane bordered by elders, and that is where I must post myself.' I think my reasoning was logical enough. I left my place and

passed along by the garden wall; I turned to the back, and I found myself not ten steps from the private gate. I could have seen any one come in or go out, but I should have been seen myself. So, in order that I might not be discovered, I burrowed into a clump of elders, among which there was unfortunately mingled eglantine — you know — wild roses — and there are no roses without thorns, even wild ones — in fact, I think it would be more correct to say particularly wild ones, ha! ha! ha!"

When he had laughed solus at what he had just said, the little man resumed,—

"In spite of some scratches, some pricks which I got from the bushes, I had fully decided not to abandon my position, when a noise, at first at a distance, reached me, I listened and, as the sound drew nearer, I heard —"

"Fifteen, fourteen, and the point. Well, neighbor, I hope that is what may be called a good stroke." And M. Boulingrin burst into a homeric shout of laughter.

The exclamation of the old notary excited the indignation of the whole company except Madame Valbrun, who, instead of being irritated, could not refrain from laughing.

"Really, M. Boulingrin, you are hard-hearted," said Madame Grospré; "play, since that is your passion, but don't prevent us from listening to M. Monfignon, whom you cut short at the most interesting moment."

"What? I've cut monsieur — me — why, he isn't playing."

"Enough, enough! go on with your game, but do be quiet. Go on, M. Monfignon. You were in a bush, pricked by nettles —"

"No, not by nettles, but by wild roses."

"And you had received on the head the contents of a nocturnal bowl," added Dupétral, laughing.

"No, monsieur, pardon me, I said a washbowl; I did not add nocturnal. There is a distinction."

"Never mind stopping about that, dear poet, but finish. You heard a distant sound."

"Yes, madame, a sound which presently drew nearer — it became very loud — a great galloping."

"Pshaw! dancing a galop in the lane —"

"M. Dupétral, you are getting unbearable — silence."

"No, mesdames, it was not a dance, as this gentleman professes to believe, it was the galloping of an animal, which was coming ventre à terre or nearly so. I thought I should have a cavalcade on my back and I could not help trembling in my bushes. At length the rider, for there was but one, passed quite near me — and I recognized, whom do you suppose? M. Martin on donkey-back — that term is admissible, though this animal was as strong as a mule. Mother Grivois, the fruiterer, has a very nice donkey to carry her vegetables, but he is a spaniel compared to this one of M. Martin's."

"Why, this is a great joke. What, M. Martin has a donkey now?"

"What a singular idea! What does he have it for? Is he a miller, this man?"

"Does nobody but a miller ever own a donkey?"

"Let us allow M. Monfignon to proceed. What became of Martin on his donkey?"

"He stopped in front of the little gate of the garden, then he gave vent to a kind of whistle — very sharp, very piercing."

"The thieves' whistle, probably."

"At this signal, for it must have been a signal, they were not long in opening the gate to him, and then I heard great shouts of laughter. The rider entered the garden, still on his donkey, they shut the gate again; the shouts of laughter diminished in the distance, and then I heard nothing more at all. So I decided to quit my bush, delighted at my discovery, and promising myself to impart to you all I had experienced at that moment. 'Dixi.'"

And the little gentleman wiped his forehead and breathed as though he had come up six flights of stairs.

"For all that," said Dupétral, who loved to vex the poet, "your strange news is confined to the fact that a miller came home on his donkey."

"And you see nothing strange in what I have told you?"

"Oh, it's middling."

"And the singular words that M. Monfignon

heard," cried Madame Rifflard. "And those shutters hermetically closed in the middle of the day, what about them ? "

"Yes, yes," said Madame Grospré, "all that is very extraordinary, and indicates that this Martin is very much afraid that anyone should see what goes on at his house. But I promised my cousin I would tell her all about this personage who has so vividly excited our curiosity; I'm going to make her acquainted with all that we know about him. First of all, my dearest, four or five weeks ago the grocer Girard told our maids, rubbing his hands, that he had at last let his house in the spinach. They so call the isolated dwelling that M. Monfignon has described to us, because it is almost surrounded by fields of spinach, except at the back of the garden where the lane of elders is ; the lands at the side and in front of the house are all given to the cultivation of this vegetable. This house had been vacant for over a year, nobody wanted to live in it. 'Why,' do you say ? In the first place, it is lonely, outside the town ; and in the second, because the last person who lived in it hung himself there. This was an Englishman who had the habit of hanging himself in every country he lived in."

"And he did not die of it, or so it would seem?"

"No, he always used a rope which broke. It was through his servant that we learned all these details. But this time he did die of it, because his

servant, tired of remaining in the service of a man who only half hung himself, this time had put a sound rope in place of the one his lord habitually used. It was with the very laudable idea of curing his master of his mania for hanging himself."

"And this precious servant was probably relying on his master's will!" said M. Postulant, smiling.

"I don't know about that, but it is probable."

"M. Boulingrin, in your former occupation as a lawyer you must have noticed something."

"What was that, M. Postulant? I have six cards."

"That is, that unless one is forced to do so by a conglomeration of affairs, it is a very foolish thing indeed to make one's will; it's a roundabout way of getting one's self stabbed, poisoned or drowned."

"Oh, M. Postulant — and four by the queen — I can't endorse your opinion."

"As a lawyer, that is possible, but as an observer?"

"You think too ill of the world — and three aces."

"I see it as it is, unfortunately."

"An apothecary," muttered Dupétral, "sees more people ill than well."

This jocular remark made Madame Grospré frown and glance angrily at the young clerk of the mairie as she said,—

"It seems, this evening, that no one is to be allowed to finish a story here. In fact, my dear

cousin, the grocer Girard had let his house in the spinach all furnished— "

" With the rope for hanging purposes? "

" Probably there are a few strands of it left. The maids naturally asked him who had taken it; he answered that it was M. Frémont who had rented it for one of his friends in Paris, who wanted to breathe the pure country air. The grocer asked the name of his tenant, and M. Frémont said that he was named Martin. That was a little vague, there are so many Martins! We have four of them already, right here in our town — we have been obliged to give them sobriquets to distinguish them: we have Big Martin, Red Martin, Flat-nosed Martin, Bandy-legged Martin,— "

" To say nothing of all the Martins secs! " exclaimed the poet, balancing on his chair with a satisfied expression.

" The news of this expected arrival spread. Everyone watched impatiently for the arrival of the new personage, and they expected that he would call upon all the notabilities of the town, as is the custom of a newcomer. A week passed and nobody came. One morning my husband, M. Grospré, met in front of Girard's shop a very singular looking personage. He wore a sort of sack coat, enormously wide trousers, a gray felt hat shaped like a sugar loaf, with a wide brim like those of Italian or Spanish or any other bandits; in short, such a hat as nobody wears, and which he wore well-drawn

down over his eyes, in such a fashion that only the tip of his nose could be seen, and his mustache and his full beard. Naturally, M. Grospré was struck by the sight of this person."

"And he had good reason to be!" exclaimed Madame Rifflard. "A man of whom nothing could be seen but the nose? that is not enough."

"M. Grospré went into the grocer's and asked him if he knew the peculiarly dressed individual who had just passed. 'Why of course,' answered Girard, 'that is my tenant, M. Martin.' 'The one who has rented your house in the spinach?' 'It's himself.' 'He has got here then?' 'He's lived in the house a week now.' 'He has a hangdog look, has your tenant. Believe me, you'd better get your pay in advance.' 'I have,' said the grocer, 'they've taken it for six months and they've paid me.' 'Further, do you know, he's not at all polite, your tenant; he passed beside me and did not bow to me!' 'He does not know you.' 'That has nothing to do with it, he should have bowed to me. In fact, he's been here a week, you say, and he has not paid a single visit, he's presented himself nowhere. I repeat to you he's a man who does not know how to live, who knows nothing of the usages of society.' Was not that what you said to the grocer Girard, M. Grospré?"

The former Hercules placed his cards on the table and answered,—

"That is the exact truth. I may as well add,

that that is nearly word for word the speech which I used. The grocer Girard had no answer to make, and he went to weigh Madame Coquenard's prunes, which she was buying for her husband, who uses them for dietetic purposes."

"I offered her a bottle of my elixir," cried M. Postulant, "but she did not want her husband to take it; he would have been cured long ago if he had only drunk one bottle."

"My aunt has taken two bottles for her cold, and it's not a bit better," said the dandy Sautrond.

"Pardon me, M. Sautrond, your aunt is better, and the proof of it is that now she expectorates, while formerly she did not expectorate."

"It seems to me, you are forgetting M. Martin," said Madame Breillet.

"You are right," said Madame Grospré. "It is my husband's fault; he always goes off at a tangent, and had no occasion to speak of Madame Coquenard and her prunes. This Martin, or rather, this unknown stranger, had arrived there. The news spread, and everyone was curious to see this personage whose portrait I have drawn according to what M. Grospré had told me.

"It seems to me," said Madame Valbrun, "that to obtain information in regard to the new inhabitant of your little town you had but to address this M. Frémont who had rented the house for him, and who necessarily must have known him."

"Do you imagine, my dear cousin, that this idea

did not occur to us? Of course, some one went to inquire of M. Frémont. But this latter is another original, and says things that nobody can believe, because he always appears to be making fun of people. He's a Parisian who came here and settled three or four years ago, with the remains of a fortune he had dissipated in Paris, where he led the life of a Sardanapalus. Unable longer to maintain his opera dancers —"

"His rats!"

"Who said, 'His rats'?"

"It was I," said Dupétral, "because that is the term now in use when speaking of these choregraphs!"

"Well, they are nice in Paris!" said Mademoiselle Mignonette; "the idea of calling women rats. Mice would be all well enough, because they are little, lively, cunning beasts — but rats are roving animals."

"That is precisely why they have given this name to opera dancers."

"Enough, young man! — you forget you are talking to a young lady! I was saying that as M. Frémont could no longer continue his gay life in Paris he came to our charming town — our delightful city."

Madame Grospré lingered on these last words, looking round on the company with an expression that seemed to say, "That is to teach my cousin not to consider our neighborhood as a little town."

And the company smiled in a manner which signified, "You did very well — we understand you."

"Yes, this M. Frémont came here, saying, 'I can't live any longer in Paris in these embarrassed circumstances, but I can manage to do it in the provinces; with what remains to me I can still throw dust in the eyes of these provincials; for there are some Parisians who think we of the provinces are stupid."

"That's true — that is very true!" said M. Liroquet; "however, we are not."

"Oh, there are quite a few of us who are," muttered Dupétral, laughing.

"No, monsieur, I assert that in the provinces we all have wit — and the more wit because we do not waste it."

"Then I think there must be some people who are altogether too miserly with it; they want to lay it up for their old age, I suppose!"

"Yes, monsieur, that is why Montaigne said, by the way, was it Montaigne? — I'm not quite sure, but that is no matter. This is the quotation, 'How many people come into the world, and go out of it without having exposed all their goods for sale?'"

"What does that mean?" cried M. Grospré, placing his cards; "What goods can one have bought before coming into the world. Your quotation seems like humbug to me. Pardon, ladies, but that word is allowable, you've heard Monfignon say it."

"The contractor is sadly lacking in conception!" said Dupétral aside to Sautrond, who answered regretfully,—

"I'm sorry they no longer wear trouser-straps, they drew down the trousers and made them look much better."

"My good Grospré," said the poet Monfignon, rather mockingly, "Montaigne's phrase is metaphorical; by goods or merchandise he means talents, capabilities, the mental qualities with which an individual is endowed at birth."

"Oh, very well; that's a different matter. I have five cards, and a fourteen from ten. You are swamped, Boulingrin."

"And that recalls to me some adventures that happened to a literary man of my acquaintance!" resumed Monfignon, "very spicy adventures, very singular, which proves that everything here below is but good or bad luck, as the case may be — a truth that is well-known."

"And what were these adventures, my dear poet? Can you not relate them to us, if I am not indiscreet in asking you?" said Madame Grospré.

"There is not the slightest indiscretion, my dear lady; but I think I must have told you the unlucky adventures of poor Tartenpomme before."

"Tartenpomme! that's the first time I have ever heard the name, and it is certainly original enough to be remembered if one had heard it before."

"Well, then, I'll tell you these adventures; but

it will take us away from our subject, this interesting M. Martin."

"What does that matter? we shall always have time to come back to it. As for me, I like variety in the conversation."

"You would not be a woman if you did not like variety."

"I assure you, M. Boulingrin, you have scored ten points too many, you thought you had made cards, and you have not made them."

"M. Grospré, I have only marked my own score; I am perfectly sure of it—do you suppose me capable of cheating in the score?"

"No, M. Boulingrin, I well know you to be incapable of doing so, but one may be mistaken—no one is infallible."

"Errare humanum est," said Monfignon.

M. Grospré, who did not understand Latin, bowed and said, "Just as you like." But the former notary, who only understood that they doubted the scoring of his points, exclaimed,—

"I am never mistaken, monsieur, I have only marked the points I have scored!"

"Hallo, you gentlemen at piquet, will you kindly refrain from shouting so loud? or, rather, do not shout at all. M. Monfignon is about to relate to us the adventures of his friend Tartenpomme, and we shall take it very kindly if you will permit us to hear him."

Thus apostrophized by Madame Rifflard, the

piquet players were silent or contented themselves with whispering very low.

"I am positively certain he marked ten points too many."

"I can't comprehend how they dare doubt my points — but this Grospré judges others by himself."

"If I were to lose because of ten points I should take this game to heart."

The little poet Monfignon waited until silence was completely re-established; then he blew a fanfare on his nose and at once began his recital.

CHAPTER IV

M. Tartenpomme's Adventures. Monfignon Disputes with M. Postulant. Down with Latin

"I must first inform you, mesdames and messieurs, that Tartenpomme, the hero of my story, had the good fortune to be born at Chartres, the native place of the pies of that ilk; he differed, however, from Homer in this, that no one had disputed the place of his birth, for, as you must know, a great many towns claimed the distinction of being the one where the great Greek poet first saw the light of day, among others, Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Chios, Argos and Athens. But, then, on the other hand, Tartenpomme was no Homer.

"By the way, observe that the greatest men of antiquity have not escaped criticism. Some people haveeven ventured to assert that Homer took from Hesiod all that was best and finest in the Odyssey and the Iliad.

"Caligula ordered the general suppression of all the works of this great poet, asserting that his influence was as great as that of Plato, who had been banished on account of his 'Republic.'

"I do not know if there was then a censor, but this incident affords reason for presuming that Caligula was one of the first censors. The Emperor Claude also showed himself hostile to Homer, whose verses he could not bear, perhaps because he could not understand them.

"But in all times we may see how few men rendered justice to talent, to worth, or even to genius. Was not Sophocles prosecuted by one of his children, who wished to make him pass for a fool? Critics have condemned the pretentious style of Pindar; others, the severity which predominated in that of Æschylus; and still others the framework of Euripides' tragedies. Good God! what would they say now, if they were to see 'Lazare le pâtre' or 'le Sonneur de Saint-Paul?' They would not be able to understand them at all. And notice that I do not say that with the intention of criticising these two dramas by M. Bouchardy; quite otherwise, I am very fond of these ambiguous plays, where the intrigues cross and mingle and entangle themselves one with the other; I only know that with 'Lazare le pâtre' Euripides would have made, not one tragedy, but, at least, a dozen."

"Confound it!" muttered young Sautrond, as he arranged the ends of his shirt collar, "all this is very well, but I hardly see where this M. Tartenpomme comes in."

"Oh, but we haven't got to it yet, my dear fellow," answered Dupétral, "with this wordy chap

Monfignon, who insists on showing off his learning, there is no end to the digressions, and he never is done with it. Look at the clock, I bet you six dozen oysters that in an hour from this he won't have done his story. To ask him to relate an adventure is exactly as if one were to listen to Scheherezade when telling a story to the sultan, in the 'Thousand and One Nights.' Come now, will you bet?"

"By Jove, no, I should be afraid of losing, for I see that our man is wading deeper and deeper in his citations."

Monfignon continued, in fact, growing animated as he spoke,—

"Yes, mesdames, yes, messieurs, genius was often the victim of criticism as false as it was malicious. I don't say that on my own account, because, not having yet finished my comedy of manners, I have not yet given it to the public, but I quite expect when I do that I shall be pounced on by a pack of Aristarchuses of all colors, who, while they have not the ability to write one scene, drag in the mire him who has the audacity to write a play without asking their permission. I shall bear all their criticisms without flinching, for I shall say to myself: Why should I be secure from the criticism of these gentlemen? Socrates was accused of usury by Cicero and of ignorance by Athené. Plato was exposed to a crowd of critics — Theo accused him of lying; Suidas, of avarice; Porphyry,

of incontinence; Aulus-Gelius, of larceny; Aristophanes, of impiety; and others of a certain vice which I cannot bring myself to name. Aristotle, who composed more than four hundred volumes, and who received from Alexander eight hundred talents —

"You are, perhaps, going to ask me what a talent is worth, I shall answer that the Attic talent weighed as much as five hundred of our silver marks — which makes — I don't remember for the moment, but we will come back to it later on; I must say, though, that Aristotle was no more economical than the others.

"If one were to believe Pliny, Vergil did not shine as an inventor, and Caligula would not allow that he had any wit, I must beg you to notice in passing that this M. Caligula was not very amiably inclined towards men of letters. Hérennius had also reproached Vergil with many faults. Perilius Faustinus said that the Æneid was a very common work. Ah, mesdames, if I had time I would recite you some verses! It is true that as you do not know Latin they would hardly amuse you. I shall make a free translation of them as soon as I have time.

"Horace the poet vigorously condemned Plato's bad jokes. Quintilian and Martial asserted that Lucan should be ranked among the orators, rather than among the poets. Livy has been reproached with his aversion for the Gauls, and Dion with his

aversion for the republic; Velleius Paterculus for his shameful compliance with the vices of Tiberius; Herodotus and Plutarch for their excessive patriotism; and, finally, Demosthenes, called by Cicero himself the most celebrated, the greatest of orators, had according to Hermippas, more art than natural talent. His orations seemed too studied, and if we can place any reliance on Æschines, his language was not always pure."

Here M. Monfignon stopped to take breath, and Madame de Beaurivage leaned towards Madame Postulant and, thinking she was speaking in a whisper, shouted in that lady's ear,—

"Is he still talking about M. Martin's donkey?"

This question being heard by all the company provoked a general shout of laughter.

"No, madame," replied the pharmacist's spouse to the lady afflicted with deafness. "No, we have long been far from this M. Martin, who, from my point of view, is an infinitely more interesting subject of conversation than all these poets of another epoch, that they positively wish to have us admire and who perhaps would none of them have known how to prepare an injection — are you not of my opinion?"

"Yes, yes, I like radishes too, but they don't agree with me; I can't digest them."

Madame Postulant turned away, deeming it unnecessary to prolong the conversation with Madame de Beaurivage.

As the orator Monfignon was wiping away the perspiration which streamed down his face, Madame Grospré ventured to say to him, in honeyed accents and carefully assuming her most smiling expression,—

"Pardon me, my dear author, you tell us a great number of things which are certainly most interesting, although perhaps a little too deep for us, it had seemed to me that you were about to relate to us the adventures of a certain M. Tartenpomme, who probably was not of the time of Homer or of Vergil, since you were acquainted with him — and up to the present we are like Sister Anne in the story of Bluebeard, we see nothing coming which bears any resemblance to that gentleman."

Monfignon inhaled a pinch of snuff with a certain grace, then he smiled as he answered,—

"Ah, that is just like the women, always impatient, always desirous of coming to an end! and when they have attained that end, God knows if they will be satisfied to quietly stop there, 'Quid femina possit.' Excuse me, I always forget that you don't know Latin — but M. Postulant will be able to translate it for you.

"Yes, mesdames, yes, I was about to tell you of poor Tartenpomme's adventures, but one does not start out on a journey without loitering and looking about him a little on the way. As for myself, I must confess that from my childhood I have not exactly played truant, but I always liked to take

the longest road. Sometimes, even, I took one which did not lead to my school, but exactly in the opposite direction. But I did not loiter unfruitfully, I looked around me, I noticed all that was curious or remarkable on my way; for an observant mind there is always something to see and study; and where the indifferent or unintelligent man will pass without stopping, the observer will find something to discover whether it be for knowledge, or health, or the mind, or merely to satisfy a natural curiosity.

"Wait a bit, this recalls to me a fact quite simple in its inception but that led to a discovery which later on became of the greatest service to me during the whole course of my life. I was then twelve, nay, almost thirteen years old. I had carried off a prize for Latin, and two for memorizing; my parents, who were very pleased with my progress, had fondled and caressed me and allowed me to go with some young playmates to a festival in the neighborhood of our dwelling. People always do wrong in giving too much liberty to children, for it is very rarely that they do not abuse it. I say that, yet no one is a firmer partisan of liberty than I. O God! liberty is so beautiful!—when it is real! unfortunately every one understands it in his own way, and all those people who preach liberty so vociferously ordinarily end by fighting and tearing each other to pieces because each one of them wants to do and take what pleases him. And what does

please him? Why, the first places and the best morsels inevitably.

"For instance, I confess to you that I care nothing for that liberty that France thought she possessed in '92 and '93, and which was nothing but a frightful tyranny. When people may read on all the walls, 'Liberty, fraternity or death!' this liberty cannot make them cheerful or give them a desire to dance. Then death was the order of the day, it was much worse than thimble-rigging, people had good reason not to like it, for they put it everywhere. You read it on the barber's shop: 'People shaved here in perfect liberty, or death!' A grocer had painted over his shop front a shopman who was serving Gruyère cheese with Death standing behind him to see that he did not give false weight.

"Finally, a restaurateur, wishing to be in the fashion, and to curry favor with some sans-culottes, put on his restaurant bill of fare, 'Meat soup or death'; 'Beef and cabbage or death'; 'Chicken fricassee or death'; and so forth and so on; this agreeable phrase accompanied all the dishes. So that some good provincials who went into this restaurant to get something to eat began to weep bitterly when they read the bill of fare, and said to the waiter, 'Citizen waiter, we will eat of everything, we promise you, even should we make ourselves ill; but, please, do not give us death!"

"By Jove, I did well not to bet," said handsome young Sautrond to his neighbor Dupétral. "You

were right, it's just like the 'Thousand and One Nights'; in fact one wonders if these are not Arabian tales?"

"That doesn't bother me in the least, and besides I am curious to see how the Reign of Terror in France is going to lead us to Tartenpomme's adventures."

M. Postulant who probably was not of the same opinion as Dupétral, and thought that M. Monfignon abused his memory and his facility of speech, cried,—

"Say, neighbor, it seems to me you're getting a long way from your subject. Was it to tell us of the Reign of Terror that you began to speak? If so, say on; I know there are some very curious anecdotes to be related of that epoch; but if it was to tell us the adventures of your M. Tartenpomme, who is your contemporary, so you've said, then come back to your hero. I repeat to you, like M. Prudhomme in the 'Famille Improvisée,' where Henri Monnier was so funny, 'Do you wish to talk about Dazincourt? then, talk about Dazincourt; but let us decide on what subject you are going to treat.' By Jove! Henri Monnier! there is a fine fellow who has the spirit of money-making! and what talent as a delineator, as a caricaturist! And you should hear him in company when he plays the scene of the gentleman who arrives at night by diligence — it was naturally written at the time when they still had diligences — you would

die with laughing, split your sides. I heard him once in Paris, at the house of a literary man, one of his friends; what a delightful evening I passed. I talked a good deal with him. If he should ever pass through our town I will bring him to see you, mesdames, and I am sure you will thank me for so doing."

M. Monfignon, who began to think it ill that the pharmacist should cause so long an interval in his speech, said,—

"I know but very little of Henri Monnier; I have heard tell of him. One of my friends wanted to see him play at the Odéon in 'Monsieur Prudhomme.' He went to that theatre and unfortunately he did not read the notice before going in; they had changed the play and, instead of 'Monsieur Prudhomme,' he saw 'Andromaque.' That is how much I know of Henri Monnier."

"You might as well say at once that you don't know him at all; as for me I would rather know Henri Monnier, than to know all that Caligula wanted to do to Homer and to Virgil — that's my way of thinking."

"Come now, M. Postulant, it seems to me that you are knocking a chip off my shoulder. Have you any intention of insulting me?"

"Why, no, monsieur, but I'm telling you my way of thinking; if that is not yours, that is all the same to me, I shall not change it."

"Hang it, monsieur, I'm not at all concerned

that your way of thinking differs from mine. That which denotes knowledge and learning tires you — I understand, we only care for the things that lie right at our own doors. Formerly the apothecaries — for apothecaries or pharmacists, it is all the same thing, they have changed the name but the occupation remains in 'statu quo' — formerly, I say, the apothecaries were obliged to be well-educated, to understand Latin and Greek, to have acquired their humanities, in short. Today it is quite different — the requirements are infinitely less severe; I knew one who always wrote emetic with an h."

"Monsieur, you are insulting the body of pharmacists, and I will not stand it."

"Monsieur, why did you insult the savants? Why do you prefer Henri Monnier to Caligula?"

"Because I choose. Am I not master of my own opinions? What need have you to stick your nose into them?"

"Mind where you stick your own, monsieur."

"Come! Come! What, gentlemen, are you quarrelling?" exclaimed Madame Grospré, "what does this mean? Friends, neighbors, for I am sure you mutually esteem and like each other in the depths of your hearts."

"It is quite in the depths then," muttered M. Postulant.

"Fie for shame, messieurs! It is not kind of you to disturb the harmony which always reigns in our meetings — but I'm sure you are sorry already."

"You are right, madame," said the little poet, "I was very wrong to take offence at what this gentleman said, it was hardly worth while."

"Then peace is restored, and now M. Monfignon will resume the thread of his recital."

"What thread, good Lord!" muttered Dupétral, "it's not a skein, it is an immense ball to unwind."

"As I was saying, then — where had I stopped?" exclaimed Monfignon.

"You were speaking of good provincials, who, under the reign of liberty, believed they were obliged to eat of everything that there was on the restaurant bill of fare, so as not to be put to death."

"Oh, that's singular — how the devil did I get there. Oh, I remember; my parents had permitted me to go to a village fair with several of my little playmates, and at this fair, abusing the liberty they had allowed me, I had bought more than five francs' worth of gingerbread with which I feasted my friends, but of which I had also eaten a goodly share myself. Croquets, gingerbread men, macaroons, I had swallowed to such an extent that the after results were anything but pleasant to me; and at this village fair — I — "

"You judged it suitable to put yourself in the same state as the village!" said Dupétral, laughing.

"The very thing, you supplied the word, or rather you have turned it, which is much cleverer. I found myself, then, in the same condition as the

village, which was infinitely less agreeable for me than for the village, for there were plenty of people there, while I sought a lonely place where I could lie and moan to myself; nor could I join in the games which are always in evidence at country fairs. I returned to my parents in a piteous state."

"Really, this is extremely interesting for us," muttered the pharmacist, leaning towards M. Liroquet; while Madame de Beaurivage, who wanted to appear as though she heard everything, exclaimed,—

"Ah, I understand, that often happens, it happened to me the day I married the late M. de Beaurivage and he was delighted at it. He said, taking me in his arms, 'Don't blush for what you have said, darling! it has rendered me the happiest of mortals.'"

"But what the devil did you say, madame?" cried Dupétral, nearly putting his nose into the deaf woman's ear.

"Good heavens! I confessed my love; I had exclaimed as we came from the mairie, 'Oh, it is so amusing to get married'—I was such a child—I was so innocent! I'm speaking of what is long past."

"She had no need to add that!" remarked M. Breillet.

"I was, then, in a very sad condition, which lasted for a long time," resumed M. Monfignon,

"I became pale, thin, puny; if you had seen me then it would have pained you."

"It pains me a good deal now," muttered the pharmacist, "for he flounders about in a pitiable fashion, and I doubt he will never finish his story."

"But as I had the honor of telling you just now, mesdames, I was extremely observing, I wanted to see everything, I loved to inform myself. There are some people who don't understand this taste — so much the worse for them — let us leave them in their ignorance."

"'Beati pauperes spiritu! quoniam ipsorum est regnum cælorum!' monsieur," said the pharmacist in his turn, pleased to show that he also could on occasion make use of a little Latin quotation.

"Yes, monsieur, I know that," answered Monfignon; "but that is all the same to me! I prefer to be witty here below. And, besides, who was it that said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'? it was probably some one who was not so."

"It was Saint-Augustine, monsieur."

"I think you are mistaken as to that, monsieur."

"Why, do you think I'm mistaken?"

"Because you are in error."

"'Plus negare potest asinus quam probare philosophus.'"

"What does that mean, M. Postulant? do you want to compare me to a donkey now?"

"Oh, you are angry now because I retorted in Latin. You mustn't think to overwhelm us. Oh,

you assert that pharmacists are ignoramuses, they can prove the contrary to you, monsieur, 'Vita brevis, ars longa, occasio præceps, experientia fallax, judicium difficile,' monsieur. Ha, ha! That's from Hippocrates, that is! That corners you!"

"Monsieur, it would be much better for you to say at once that you wish to prevent me from continuing my story than to interrupt me at every turn."

"Messieurs! messieurs! are you going to begin again?" cried Phœbe, "and for Latin again! Frankly, it is not very polite of you to continually insert it into your conversation; you know the ladies do not understand it. Once for all, messieurs, we beg you to omit that old dead language from your speech. We shall give a forfeit, and a very serious forfeit this time, to the first who infringes our order. Are you of my opinion, mesdames?"

"Yes, yes, no more Latin! a forfeit for Latin!" exclaimed all the ladies raising their hands, and Madame de Beaurivage, although she was ignorant why they made this demonstration, raised her hand in the air and waved her handkerchief, exclaiming,—

"Yes, yes, long live the railways — that has always been my opinion. It is a case of saying with Louis XIV, 'There are no more Pyrenees!'"

CHAPTER V

Rose-haws. The Title of a Play

Monsieur Monfignon allowed the hilarious effect which Madame de Beaurivage's exclamations always produced to pass, and when the company had at length ceased to laugh, he resumed his speech,—

"I was, as I said, very unwell, quite ill, in fact, and did not know how to recover my normal state, when one day as I was walking in the country I saw a small boy occupied in picking those little red berries which remain on the bushes after the roses have fallen, and which they call, I believe, rose-haws."

"Yes, yes, rose-haws," cried the ladies, "everybody knows what they are. Go on."

"As the little boy seemed to take much pleasure in eating the rose-haws, it gave me a desire to taste them, and I ate freely of them. They are not delicious, but they have a little tart taste that is not unpleasant. Judge of my surprise, my happiness, when on the day following that on which I had gourmandized rose-haws, I found I had regained my usual health. Since that time I have always kept a store of those little berries — they keep very well,

and if my health is deranged, I swallow four or five and I am cured."

"And he's taken an hour to tell us just that!" muttered Madame Postulant. "Really M. Monfignon must be making sport of us. If he had only taken my husband's elixir that would have been worth a good deal more than all the astringents of the vegetable kingdom."

"But, madame," said Phœbe, "since M. Monfignon at that time was a child it is probable that your husband had not yet composed his miraculous elixir."

"I," said the widow of four husbands, "find medlars as efficacious as rose-haws, and vastly more agreeable to take."

"I demand Tartenpomme, or my money back," cried Dupétral laughing.

"All right, I won't turn aside from my story again," responded Monfignon, darting an angry glance at the pharmacist, who was pretending to go to sleep on his chair. "I think I've told you that my hero was born at Châtres. I need not tell you that before the Christian era, Châtres was the city of Carmites to which Cæsar gave the name of Autricum, which it bore until the fourth century; later on it had certain counts who became counts of Champagne — later on —"

"That'll do! That'll do! Since you need not tell us, why do you tell us?" cried Dupétral.

Monfignon stifled a sigh as he said to himself,

"It's like trying to make a negro white to try to make a fool love knowledge." Then he resumed his narration,—

"Tartenpomme's father was a pastrycook named Beuglant —"

"Tartenpomme was his baptismal name then?" said M. Liroquet. "That surprises me, for I've never seen it in the calendar."

"No, monsieur, I am aware that the prenomen of Tartenpomme is not in the calendar; but if you had not interrupted me again, you would have learned that it was but a nickname that had been conferred upon my young pastrycook because he showed a particular liking for that form of pastry which is called tarte aux pommes[1]; as soon as his father took a batch of these dainties from the oven, the little boy threw himself upon them, and it was impossible to keep one of them in M. Beuglant's shop, because monsieur his son immediately caused them to disappear. From this, the idea came to his parents and the customers of calling little Beuglant Tartenpomme instead of Nicholas, which was his baptismal name.

"With the fondness he evinced for this kind of pastry, one would have thought that little Tartenpomme would have exhibited a taste for his father's trade and that he would have become a celebrated pastrycook; well, not at all! M. Beuglant's son loved to eat pastry, but he did. not want to make

1 Apple tart.

it. His vocation was to write, to produce pieces for the stage, in short, to become an author. When his father scolded him and desired him to make forcemeat balls for his raised pies, Tartenpomme would exclaim, 'One can earn a good deal more money writing farces for the theatre!' and he would quote in support of this proposition the plays of M. So-and-So. Then he would say, 'Master André the wigmaker has written a tragedy, and why shouldn't I write a drama?'

"Papa Beuglant, who was not altogether ignorant (I have known very witty pastrycooks), would answer his son, 'Yes, Master André the wigmaker wrote a tragedy which he even had the audacity to send to M. de Voltaire, treating him as a dear confrère; but M. de Voltaire answered him by a letter which only contained this phrase on two pages, "Make wigs! make wigs, and again — make wigs!"' 'I know, father,' said Tartenpomme, 'and when he read this answer, Master André cried, "It's easy to be seen that M. de Voltaire is growing old; how he repeats himself." But I have not the slightest intention of writing a tragedy, I know that that sort of play is gone out. I want to write a drama.' 'Make some cakes, that would be a great deal better, and you are sure of getting a profit out of them.' 'I shan't make a fortune selling cakes!' 'Why not? I could quote you several instances of cake-dealers who have sold their stocks at fabulous prices. If you prefer buns, make halfpenny buns.

They sell as well as bread — better than bread, and it does not necessitate any great expense to establish a business.'

"But young Beuglant would neither make cakes nor buns, and he asserted —"

"What, M. Grospré, you take with a heart?"

"Of course; I take your knave with my queen, it's quite simple."

"It would be quite simple, in fact, if you had not revoked hearts when I played them just now."

"I didn't revoke hearts, I put one down, M. Boulingrin."

"You put one on the ace, but you did not throw one on the king."

"Yes, monsieur, I put one down every time the cards called for one."

"No, monsieur; besides, you could not have the queen third, because I had six hearts."

"Five — you counted five of them."

"Because I missed one of them."

"Oh, that is another thing!"

"I'm going to look in the ones I've discarded."

"That is needless, monsieur, let us throw out this hand, that's the simplest way!"

"What throw out the hand! when I've won it? That's a nice proposition to make."

"Silence! piquet players!" cried Madame Grospré, "or we shall have to beg you, messieurs, to go and play in another room, for no one can possibly hear M. Monfignon with your eternal disputes."

"Monsieur revoked hearts and then he takes a trick with the queen of that suit."

"Enough! not a word more; by our private authority we annul the trick."

"But madame—"

"But madame—"

"My dear Monfignon, excuse these tiresome card players, and will you resume your interesting story? You stopped at the little halfpenny buns."

"I hope he'll pass on to those at a farthing and then he'll be done with it," muttered M. Postulant.

"Papa Beuglant resisted Tartenpomme's solicitations; he would not believe that an author, a literary man, could make a fortune, and there were plenty of examples which he might have suggested in opposition to his son's idea. He did not quote them for he was not learned enough to know them, or he might have said to him, 'My son, it is very rarely that fortune accompanies worth! Homer, poor and blind, went about the streets reciting his verses to obtain the means of supporting himself. Plautus, a comic poet, full of inspired originality, was obliged to resort to turning a millstone in order to earn his living. Xylander sold his notes on Dion Cassius for a plate of soup. Aldus Manutius was so poverty-stricken that he rendered himself insolvent by merely borrowing what would transport his library and all his manuscripts from Venice to Rome. Jean Bodin, Sigismond Gelenius. Lelio Giraldi, and an infinite number of other

learned men died in indigence. Agrippa died in the hospital, and it is believed that the immortal author of Don Quixote, of that masterpiece admired and translated into all languages, died in need and poverty. Paul Borghese, an Italian poet who also wrote "Jerusalem Delivered," was acquainted with fourteen trades and had not the wherewithal to live. Tasso was reduced to such poverty that he would go and borrow a crown, upon which he would live for a whole week, and in a pretty sonnet he begged his cat to lend him during the night her power of seeing in the darkness, thus addressing her,—

Non avendo candele per iscrivere i suoi versi !

"Oh, mesdames, I see you ready to overwhelm me with reproaches and give me a forfeit, but you can't do that, for that is not Latin but Italian! That soft, tender language which expresses love so well — the language of lovers and singers, for it lends itself also to music, and a great singer will utter for you a 'si' or an 'ut' in an opera bouffe that she could never accomplish if she were to sing the same piece in French. So do not, I beg of you, proscribe Italian also."

"But who is to prove to us that it really is Italian and not Latin that you quoted?" demanded the Widow Rifflard.

"Mesdames, I can't help thinking that some one of the gentlemen in this gathering must understand Italian."

"Yes, yes," cried young Sautrond, rocking on his chair. "It is really Italian, I understand it; when I was in Paris I frequented the Opera Buffa constantly; it is the meeting place of the most elegant society of the capital."

"Allow me to remark that you say 'Yes' to prove that you know Italian; it seems to me it is English?"

"I made a mistake, I meant to say 'Si, signor!'"

"The incident is closed!" cried Dupétral, "the orator may continue."

"Ah, they won't have Latin, so I'm going to bury them in Italian," said Monfignon to himself, "and with all the more pleasure that the pharmacist is unacquainted with it!"

"Well!" exclaimed Phœbe, "continue, my dear poet; you were just saying that an author had taken his cat's eyes for candles; I believe it, it does not astonish me; for I am very fond of cats and I have noticed that their eyes are infinitely brighter by night than by day."

"And when you were petting them, have you ever rubbed their hair the wrong way when it was quite dark?"

"No, never; why?"

"Because you would then have seen sparks scintillate from their bodies, for those animals contain a good deal of electricity."

"That is possible! but if I should see my cat all afire like that, it would frighten me! I should imagine it was the devil."

"But since I have told you what causes this effect?"

"All the same I should be frightened."

"Well," said Madame Rifflard, "I have a big black cat and this evening I am going to pet it till it emits sparks."

"I was telling you," resumed Monfignon, "that literary men have rarely been favorites of fortune. Cardinal Bentivoglio, the ornament of Italy and of belles-lettres, and the benefactor of the unfortunate, to whom we owe the 'History of the Civil Wars in Flanders,' a work of the very greatest merit; well, Cardinal Bentivoglio found himself in his old age under the necessity of selling his palace to pay his debts, and died without leaving enough to bury him.

"I cannot leave Italy without telling you of that poet who addressed these charming verses to the lady of his thoughts,—

> Felice chi vi mira, ma più felice chi per voi sospira!
> Felicissimo chi sospirando fa sospirar voi!—"

"Is that Italian?" inquired Madame Rifflard.

"Yes, fair lady, and of the purest."

"M. Sautrond, what does that mean?"

The young dandy scratched his ear, scratched his nose, and stammered,—

"That means — by Jove, it's quite easy to understand — that means that nothing renders me so happy as the felicity —"

"Is that right, Monfignon?"

"It is not word for word, it's a free translation."

"And Tartenpomme, is he never going to come?"

"It seems to me, madame, that it is his history I am telling you. I'll leave the poets of Italy, since you take so little interest in them. But were the men of letters in France more fortunate? André Duchesne, a learned histographer; Vaugelas, one of the first writers of his time; Baudoin of the French academy and Étoile a fecund chronicler — all those men died poor.

"And in approaching our own epoch I can cite to you, Gilbert, who died in the hospital; Hégésippe Moreau, who was not more fortunate; and many others who either hung or drowned themselves. Some of them, it is true, wanted to be poets despite Minerva, and without having received any of the gifts which cause those who have them to be so facile with the pen. But we live in a time when the young men say to themselves, 'I wish to be an author, novelist, man of letters'; as formerly they used to say, 'I want to be a jeweller, a lawyer, a doctor, an architect, a dentist.' All those occupations are accessible to those who wish to study, but do not absolutely require originality or wit. However, I must except a lawyer, for a stupid lawyer is vastly more dangerous than none at all. Nor must he, either, abuse his facility of elocution and be too talkative.

"Phocion called chatterers the 'thieves of time.'

He compared them as well to empty casks, which give out more sound than full ones, and he was right — all those orators of the cafés, orators of the newspapers, orators of the lobbies of theatres, and even orators of clubs, of society, of drawing-rooms, are nothing, the greater part of the time, but empty casks!"

"I should greatly like to know what kind of a cask he calls himself," said Dupétral to his neighbor, "he to talk about chatterers — really, that's a little bit too strong. They are quite right who say, 'Nemo in sua causa judex.'"

"Who's that speaking Latin?" cried Madame Grospré, almost jumping out of her chair.

"Certainly, it was not I, madame," said Monfignon, "I respect your commands too highly."

"It was you, then, M. Postulant?"

But the pharmacist, who was pretending to be asleep to vex Monfignon, did not answer.

"Was it you, then, M. Boulingrin?"

The old notary contented himself with answering, "Three aces, three kings and a quinte major, this time I hope I've really won."

"It was nobody, it seems — go on, Monfignon."

"Young Tartenpomme shut his father's mouth by citing to him M. Scribe and M. Dennery. The pastrycook had seen in his youth the 'Judgment of Solomon' and the 'Forest of Hermanstad,' melodramas which had an enormous success, and he answered his son, 'These plays which all Paris

was running to see were written by M. Caigniez, a modest author, but one who wrote naturally. However, I saw M. Caigniez in his old age, he was not fortunate, in spite of all he had done; he lived at Belleville, and had no means of subsistence but a pension which was paid to him by his brother authors. How was it that his success did not enrich him?'

"But young Tartenpomme, who, as he grew up informed himself about these things, answered to this, 'Father, the time is gone by when an author received nine francs every evening that they played his melodrama; then the theatrical managers alone made fortunes, and that was not just. Now it is quite different, an author has a right over the receipts and in consequence the more money that is made by his play, the more he earns. And that is why a good many authors make their fortunes and buy houses in the country.'

"Papa Beuglant was vanquished. He allowed his son to follow his vocation, while he continued to swallow apple tarts as they came out of the oven, and the young man at last produced a great drama in thirty-six scenes entitled, 'Women before the Creation of the World.'"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dupétral, "there's a title that seems to me both amphibological and amphigorical."

"I confess that I don't understand it," said M. Liroquet.

"I think it superb!" cried Madame Rifflard. "Women before the creation of the world and, consequently, before the men — it's magnificent, that is."

"And you, M. Postulant, what do you think of it?" inquired Madame Grospré.

The pharmacist merely sneezed and said he had not heard the title.

"But where did you get these women from?" inquired Dupétral of Monfignon, who answered,—

"I didn't get them at all, I'm merely telling you the title of my friend Tartenpomme's piece. I did not charge myself with the duty of explaining it to you, which does not prevent me from finding, like Madame Rifflard, that it was a superb title — a title that would make all Paris run to see it."

"Why, it is incomprehensible."

"That's exactly the reason; they want to have their minds cleared as to things they don't understand, they want to pierce the mystery which envelops the title. If you were to call a play 'Fan-fan and Colette,' or 'Two and Two make Four,' do you think that would pique their curiosity? Not at all, they would pass by the notice and not go into the theatre. But put frightful, blood-curdling titles, such as 'The Children of the Spectre,' 'The Cave of the Tomb,' or 'The Hanged Lovers' that will charm the eye, captivate the attention pique the curiosity — the crowd flocks to the theatre which announces such pieces."

"That depends on the taste," said Madame Breillet, "as for myself, I don't like horrors, and such titles as those would prevent my going."

"Well, go on, Monfignon, let us see what your author-pastrycook or your pastrycook-author did with his 'Women before the Creation of the World,' that piques our curiosity. Don't you want to know the fate of this piece, Madame de Beaurivage?"

"Yes, yes, of course we do, assuredly paniers are much less bothersome than crinolines — but they'll come back, there is no doubt of it — before two years are over our heads you will see all the ladies in paniers."

"Like the donkeys?" said Dupétral, looking at Mademoiselle Mignonette, who made a pretence of lowering her eyes, but lowered them in such a manner as to see perfectly all that went on.

Generally speaking, you would do well to distrust eyes that are always looking down, a honeyed voice, mouths that always have a smile, and men who cannot refrain from smoking. But there are so many things of which one has to be suspicious that it is necessary to be on guard, which often causes restraint in one's relations to others; it is perhaps better to be distrustful of nothing, but to say, "According to God's mercy."

CHAPTER VI

Mademoiselle Cunegonde. A journey For a Tooth

Little Monfignon was about to resume his talk, and Madame Valbrun, who was not at all entertained by the perorations of this gentleman, and who did not care to learn what women were, or what they did, before the creation of the world, was preparing, under the pretext of a headache, to go up to her room, when the door of the drawing-room opened suddenly and the poet's words were again arrested on his lips.

Everybody looked towards the door. They were curious to learn who had come so late to join the party, and several persons inwardly congratulated themselves on this unexpected visit which prevented M. Monfignon from pursuing his story of Tartenpomme. But the surprise was general when, instead of seeing some notability of the village enter, they saw only Cunegonde, the Grosprés' cook — or, rather, "cordon-bleu" — who paused on the threshhold without saying anything, and calmly reviewed the company assembled in her mistress' drawing-room.

It must be confessed that the face and headdress

of Mademoiselle Cunegonde added to the piquancy of the apparition. The cook was a stout woman of forty-five, with a fat face and fat, empurpled cheeks, a flat nose, thick eyebrows, which almost met, and a veritable mustache which would have done honor to a drummer in the National Guard. Then this damsel, who laid claim to beauty, hardly ever wore caps, but decked her head with a handkerchief of very striking colors, which she wore after the fashion of the creoles, disposing the corners in such a fashion that they formed a rosette over her left eye.

But Mademoiselle Cunegonde, like most cordon-bleus, had a great affection for the juice of the grape. She naturally dined after her employers, and then, as they rarely had further need of her services, she had no hesitation in indulging her appetite. Upon this day they had been drinking madeira and champagne at the Grosprés'. There was some left in the bottles which Mademoiselle Cunegonde had immediately seized, to the detriment of François, the valet, polisher, and groom of the former contractor.

François, who was as fond of wine as the cook, frequently had discussions with her on the subject of the remains of good wine left on the table. He asserted, with some show of reason, that she ought, at least, to share them with him, and not drink them all herself. Cunegonde, however, carefully kept them to herself, answering François thus,—

"I think it's a pretty good joke for you to ask me for what's left in the bottles after dinner, you who go to the cellar. Do you mean to say you don't do anything to all the wines down there?"

"Mademoiselle," the old groom would answer, "I go to the cellar, it is true, but I do not keep the keys; monsieur keeps them, and gives them to me when I have to go down, and says to me, 'You will bring up one bottle of bordeaux and one of champagne,' or whatever it is he wants; but when I come up from the cellar monsieur can see what I have in my basket, and if there was one there more than he asked for he would perceive it immediately; and I have to give him back the keys of the cellar. So, you see, I have no fine wines at my disposal, as you seem to think I have."

"Do you think you can silence me like that?" answered Cunegonde. "Do you think you can make me credit that when you go to the cellar alone you don't take all that suits you? You hide the bottles in some corner; you are not stupid enough to put them in the basket you show to monsieur; he sees only the number he has told you to bring up, the dear man! but later on you know where to find the bottles you have put on one side."

"That is not true, I have never done that! I am incapable of it."

"Oh, well, if you don't do it you are an old fool, that's all!"

Sometimes those discussions degenerated into

rather lively quarrels, and as on this occasion a half bottle of champagne had remained upon the table, François had tried to seize it; the cook had torn it out of his hands, but in the struggle the rosette of her kerchief had received a pull, the two corners had come untied, and stuck out on Cunegonde's head like two horns, which seemed to threaten all who attempted to approach her.

The sight of the cook, who was quite unconscious of the transformation worked in her rosette, had therefore produced a great effect upon the company, all the more so because Cunegonde, without breathing a word, continued to thrust her head forward, showing her horns, as she passed in review all those who were in the drawing-room.

"What is it you want, Cunegonde?" exclaimed Madame Grospré. "What do you come into the drawing-room for? I did not call you. And what is the meaning of that disarranged headdress? How dare you present yourself before us like that?"

"How? What do you mean, madame? Don't I look as I do every day?"

"I have told you a hundred times, wear caps, they are much more suitable."

"I had the honor to answer madame that, having served at Longjumeau, at a rich gentleman's, a planter who had come back from America with negroes and negresses, I had got into the habit of wearing a handkerchief on my head; and in hot countries, where there are richer people than there

are here, they don't think it wrong for their servants, black or white, to wear handkerchiefs on their heads like this; they're a good deal prettier than your rags of caps, which make one look fifty —"

"Enough, Cunegonde, enough! I pass over your handkerchief; but, at least, you need not turn it into a pair of horns that threaten the heavens!"

"Horns? horns?"

And the cook, putting her hand to her head, perceived the transformation of the rosette and cried,—

"It's that old drunkard of a François who has done that — he shall pay me for it, the old hunks!"

"What, Cunegonde, would you let François pull off your cap?" said Dupétral laughing.

"Ah, monsieur, you mustn't think that was done in fun. Good heavens! do you think I'd joke with a man like François, why he's sour enough to turn all my sauces."

"That is enough, Cunegonde; answer me, what are you doing here? You seem to be searching for some one?"

"Oh, well, yes, madame, I am looking for some one, but he is not here; I saw at once that he wasn't here; I was sure he wasn't, but that idiot of a François declared he was, and I was bound to make sure that he wasn't, because he kept on insisting, so I came up to see."

"But who are you looking for?"

"Doctor Mordicus."

"Doctor Mordicus, why of course he is not here."

"And he certainly won't be here this evening," said M. Postulant, "for he left for Paris this morning; he was sent for to attend a confinement case."

"What, they send from Paris to look for a doctor here?" exclaimed M. Breillet. "Faith, that seems extraordinary to me."

"Why should it, monsieur?"

"Because they have the most learned men and the cleverest in Paris."

"What's that got to do with it, monsieur? There are many people who, having been attended and successfully treated by a doctor, will not have any other when they need such services again. It is just the same with dentists; people have their favorite dentists, who will pull out a tooth and scarcely make them suffer — and of course they have no use for any other. Why, I once knew a lady very comfortably off, very distinguished, and rather pretty, who unfortunately had bad teeth, which caused her horrible suffering. People sometimes have bad teeth which cause no suffering, but this lady suffered a good deal; they would say to her, 'Why don't you go and have the tooth that troubles you out?' but this lady could hardly resolve to do so, she feared the operation so much. There are many people who dare not have a tooth out.

"At last one day her husband — this lady was married — her husband, quite put out at seeing his wife suffer so, had a bright idea, for he knew

perfectly well that it was her tooth that caused her so much pain. He went to a dentist's and said to him, 'Would it be possible for you to extract one of my wife's teeth while she is asleep?' 'Why, of course I can—during a sleep induced by chloroform.' 'Oh, no; no chloroform, I don't like it, I have no confidence in it; there are often very dangerous consequences resulting from its use; but during a natural slumber. Something that may help you very greatly is the fact that my wife always sleeps with her mouth open.' 'If she sleeps with her mouth open, the thing will go of itself, and I will take as many out for her as you wish.'

"So far so good; the appointment was made. The lady slept rather late of a morning; her husband introduced the dentist into the room, and showed him his wife sleeping with her mouth quite wide open, disclosing a row of teeth each one of which was more decayed than the others. The dentist looked at them all and cried, 'What a horrible mouth. Monsieur, I don't wonder your wife should be ill. But we will try to remedy all that.'

"Here the dentist took his instrument and so skilfully extracted the first tooth that the sleeper contented herself with turning a little. The husband was delighted; the dentist said to him, 'Let me keep on; in a few days these other teeth will cause her as much pain as the one I have taken out.' The husband consented.

"He pulled out the second tooth, the lady

coughed only a little; at the third she sneezed; finally, at the fourth she awoke altogether. Then her husband showed her the four teeth they had pulled out, saying to her, 'Here, my dear, be contented, be happy; you will suffer no more and are well rid of them.'

"When she realized that she was minus four teeth, the first thing the lady did was to slap her husband's face; then she exclaimed angrily,—'It is frightful! monsieur; you have disfigured me. I shan't dare to open my mouth again to laugh, or even to smile; I shall look ten years older at once.' 'Undeceive yourself madame,' said the dentist; 'you are now much better than you were; you suffer no longer. It seems to me, you ought to thank your husband, instead of reproaching him; for be well persuaded, madame, it is better to be lacking a few teeth than to have a malodorous breath.'

"The lady was appeased; then, delighted that she no longer suffered, she could not praise the dentist sufficiently for having taken out her four teeth, three of them without awakening her. You may imagine that she vowed to have recourse to no other should she suffer with her teeth again.

"But ten years had passed without any access of pain on her part. At the end of that time she lost her husband, but she had kept all her other teeth — which was some indemnification. However, one morning, in eating a bon-bon, she felt an

intense pain; it was a great molar which pained her. For some time she bore it as best she could, but instead of getting better, the pain increased. She could see that there was a cavity in the tooth and ulceration began to set in. 'There must be an end to this,' said the lady. 'I must go and find my marvellous dentist; it's only a matter of one tooth this time — rather a large one, it is true, but I am quite certain that he can pull it out without my feeling it.'

"This lady lived in the country; she hastened to Paris, where her dentist dwelt. Immediately on her arrival she hurried to his place, but the porter said to her, 'Madame, the dentist you are inquiring for does not live here now; he has left France and gone to settle in Switzerland, at Fribourg, where I think he has some relatives. But his successor is a very skilful man; every one who comes to him praises his dexterity; madame can go up to him if she likes.' 'Oh, no,' said the lady, 'I really cannot apply to any other than the one who formerly served me. He only can pull my tooth out without causing me pain. He is, you say, established in Switzerland, at Fribourg; well, I will go to him there. People often make journeys for pleasure; I will make a journey to get rid of my pain.'

"In fact the lady returned home and made all her preparations, constantly holding her handkerchief to her jaw, for her tooth bothered her a good deal, and then started for Switzerland in pursuit of

her excellent dentist. Arrived at Fribourg, this lady alighted at the best hotel in the place, and inquired the address of the dentist whose name she gave. But the hotel keeper answered, 'I don't know a dentist of that name. But for the matter of that, madame, you may be quite easy, for we have dentists here of the first order, who'll pull a tooth out for you almost before you have time to open your mouth. Don't be afraid to trust your jaw to them.' But this lady would have nothing to do with any but the one she knew.

"As she went all over the town she met an old Swiss woman who said to her, 'I know the person of whom you speak; in fact, that dentist was established here, and I have been to him myself; he put in two false teeth for me, which I swallowed in eating cutlets; but it was my own fault, for he had forewarned me, he had told me, "Madame, when one has false teeth one mustn't try to masticate cutlets with them; it is very rarely that they will stand such a test." This dentist got tired of Switzerland, for he found that there were not enough people troubled with bad teeth here, and he left for Italy, for Naples, where he must be established.'

"This lady heartily thanked the old Swiss woman who had put her on the traces of the one she was in search of, and was off to Italy. Fortunately the ulceration had abated somewhat, but she still suffered a good deal with her molar.

"She reached Naples and inquired for her dentist, and there it was different from Switzerland, for everybody knew him, everybody praised him. He was a man who had no equal, who did not give you the slightest pain; on the contrary he had a talent for making you laugh when he was operating on you. He knew ever so many little anecdotes, each one more comical than the other, and while listening to him you forgot to think about the motive with which you had come to him. He made you laugh so much that you opened your mouth prodigiously and he operated on you without your suspecting it. But to all these eulogies were tacked the words, 'What a pity it is that we have lost him!'

"'Good heavens! is he dead?' cried the lady. 'No, he's not dead, but he left us six months ago; the climate of Italy was too warm for him, and did not agree with him — and then he neither liked macaroni nor ravioli, nor parmesan. He left us with much regret, but nothing would turn him from his resolve.' 'It must be admitted that I have very ill-luck,' said the lady, 'to constantly miss this unequalled man after chasing him about so long. But where is he now? he must at least have told you where he was going.' 'Yes, yes. He's gone to establish himself in England, in London; because in that country of continual fogs, where it rains incessantly and the humidity is so dense, it is impossible for people to avoid having toothache.

He had taken all that into account, and he said to himself, "I shall make a fortune in England in a very short time." And then, it seems, he was very fond of roast beef and plum pudding and that helped to determine him.'

"'Let's be off to England, then,' said the poor lady, wrapping up her jaw. Behold her on board a ship which was leaving for Southampton. But the passage was not good; a storm, a tempest assailed the vessel which carried our lady and her molar; several times they were in danger of perishing, and our traveller's constant cry was, 'Must I perish then, without having my tooth extracted!' Finally, fine weather prevailed, the danger was past and she landed at Southampton; only during her journey by sea the lady had caught a severe cold, which had developed a horrid attack of whooping-cough.

"From Southampton to London is only about sixty miles, so the lady proceeded to the capital. She arrived there, coughing like one possessed, but she did arrive, and when she inquired for her dentist they immediately gave her his address. The lady thanked Providence that she was approaching the end of her pain and her travelling. She took a cab and had herself driven to the address indicated. She arrived in front of the dentist's; she saw his name written in big gold letters over his door; you may imagine her joy! and how generously she paid her cabby. She alighted from her

cab, went into the house, and entered a fine vestibule, but there she was taken with a terrible fit of coughing, and in this fit, expectorating forcibly, she spat out the tooth she had come to have pulled out.

"This was the result of all this lady's travelling. And that will prove to you that people might well send from Paris for Dr. Mordicus, since any one would travel through so many countries in search of her own dentist."

"Confound it!" said Dupétral, "I thought that was going to make the companion piece to Tartenpomme's history."

CHAPTER VII

Monsieur Postulant Becomes Zealous. The Invalid.

During the time that M. Postulant was relating the story of the lady who pursued her dentist so determinedly, Monfignon had twisted his thumbs and looked at the ceiling. Mademoiselle Cunegonde, who had remained at the entrance to the drawing-room, hastily repaired the damages in the rosette of her handkerchief, which she did so cleverly that Madame Rifflard left her place and ran to the cook, exclaiming,—

"It's astonishing with what taste she twists that! Cunegonde, who taught you to make that delightful rosette so well and quickly?"

"Madame, it was the negresses who were in the service of my master the planter. Those blackamores had a most extraordinary style and taste for that. Mercy! it was necessary for them to have something as a set-off to their skin, which looked like boiled leather."

"Will you teach me to make that rosette, Cunegonde?"

"Whenever madame wishes, I shall be at her orders."

"But, by the way, Cunegonde," resumed Madame Grospré, "you did not tell us who it was that wanted the doctor; was that also for a confinement?"

"Oh, I don't think so, but I haven't the slightest idea — but there are other doctors in the town; I'll go and send him to M. Fouillelard's, he's not a very clever one, he lets all his patients die! but after all, that's his trade."

"The person who came is still waiting, then?"

"Yes, madame, he's waiting downstairs."

"But who sent him here? Where does he come from? You haven't told us yet."

"Where does he come from — wait a bit. I don't know whether I asked him. Oh, yes, now I remember, he wanted the doctor to go to the house in the spinach, M. Martin's."

Everybody listened as they heard this word pronounced; a lively feeling of curiosity was depicted on all the faces; they drew nearer to Cunegonde, private conversations were dropped and M. Monfignon himself ceased to twirl his thumbs, which was, indeed, his favorite occupation when he was not speaking.

"What, he was sent from M. Martin's?" resumed Madame Grospré, "from that bear's house — that impolite and mysterious stranger's. And you did not tell us that at once, Cunegonde?"

"Mercy! I didn't think anything about it; how could I know it would interest you, madame?"

"It does interest us," said Madame Rifflard;

"for it may put us on the way to learn who and what this man is. Are you not of my opinion, Monfignon?"

"Assuredly! I think we must catch the ball as it flies too," answered the poet; "that may prevent my finishing the history of Tartenpomme this evening, but we shall have plenty of time to take it up again, while we shall not always have the chance to get information in regard to M. Martin."

"Before we do anything else," said M. Postulant, "we must find out who it is that has come from him — who it is that's waiting downstairs."

"Yes, yes, you are right! Cunegonde, who was it that came to ask if Dr. Mordicus was here?"

"It's a young man — a very young man of fourteen or fifteen years, a kind of errand boy."

"Oh, a sort of little gutter-snipe," said Monfignon, "I have seen that boy, he's very impudent looking."

"Why, no, why, no!" said the cook; "he presented himself very politely; on the contrary, he has a very nice face — and eyes! why, they're three times as big as mine."

This remark from the servant seemed to awaken the ladies' curiosity; they exclaimed,—

"You must send this young boy up — we must question him!"

"Yes, we must make him talk; at his age boys like to talk — to tell all they know."

"We'll pump him dry," said the pharmacist.

"We'll make him talk about his master; we'll learn from him who this Martin is."

"I will take it upon myself to question him adroitly," said Monfignon, "Madame Grospré, give orders to have the person who is below sent up here."

"You understand, Cunegonde? Send this young man up."

"But suppose he won't come."

"Why shouldn't he? You will not tell him M. Mordicus is not here, but simply say, 'They beg that you will go upstairs, monsieur.'"

Mademoiselle Cunegonde departed, after again carefully assuring herself that her rosette was as it should be.

They all drew closer together except the piquet players and Madame Valbrun, who had no intention of taking part in the questioning to which they were about to submit M. Martin's messenger.

Presently the door of the drawing-room opened again, and a youth appeared. His face was refined and intellectual, his eyes, his smile, his whole face had that lively expression so pleasing at his age, above all when it is not accompanied by the sort of common swagger which is so often adopted by boys who wish to be thought men.

This boy was attired in a well-fitting blouse, held in his hand a blue cloth cap and bowed gracefully to the company as he said,—

"Pardon me, but is M. Mordicus here?"

"Come in, come in, monsieur; don't stop at the door like that!" said Madame Grospré.

"He's a very nice boy," murmured Mademoiselle Mignonette.

"He has very fine eyes indeed," said Madame Breillet.

"Why! he's the lemonade-dealer's boy," cried Madame de Beaurivage.

"The doctor for whom you are inquiring is not here," said Madame Grospré.

"Oh, then, I beg your pardon, I'll be off."

"Wait a bit, there are other doctors in the town."

"Yes," said Monfignon, "but in the first place we must know who is ill — what is the nature of their malady and how long they have been suffering from it. In fact, who is it that's ill? You come from M. Martin, is it he who is laid up?"

While the little man was speaking the young boy looked closely at him; he compressed his lips and a mischievous expression shone in his eyes, and when Monfignon ceased speaking he burst into a fit of laughter, which seemed to please the savant very little, and he resumed,—

"What are you laughing at, youngster?"

"At you, monsieur."

"At me! and what have I done to provoke your hilarity?"

"Why, it's because I recognize you!"

"You recognize me — and where have you had the pleasure of seeing me?"

"I had the pleasure of seeing you glued to our house, where I had also the pleasure of pouring on your head the contents of a washbowl — which you had the pleasure of receiving."

The young man's tone of raillery as he made this answer, and the face that Monfignon made, amused the company greatly. The pharmacist even went so far as to burst into a very impertinent laugh.

"He's a little rascal! he's a little scamp, this urchin. I was not mistaken in saying he was a little gutter-snipe!"

"But really, my boy," said the Widow Rifflard, "there are men of skill in the town quite capable of replacing M. Mordicus. Is it M. Martin who is ill?"

"No, madame, it is not he."

"Then it is some one of his household?"

"Yes, madame."

"Have you been long at M. Martin's?"

"Yes, madame."

"You are his little groom?"

The youth hesitated for some instants before answering, then he said,—

"I am his cashier."

"His cashier!"

Every one looked at him, very much surprised by this answer; and M. Liroquet muttered, "His cashier. Then this gentleman must have a counting-house. What does he do? Is he a banker?

a stockbroker? or a commission agent? In fact, what does he do?"

"He does as he pleases, monsieur."

"That's no occupation. He's rich, then, your M. Martin?"

"I don't know, monsieur; I never asked him."

The bantering tone of the youth as he answered made the company aware that they would not get the information from him that they hoped for. Suddenly M. Postulant rose, as if he were inspired, and going towards the young fellow, said to him,—

"My young friend, I am a pharmacist favorably known in the neighborhood, I flatter myself; I have invented an elixir which works miracles; it is good for all kinds of complaints and has even cured those whom the doctors have given up. Everybody can tell you that I am not boasting. Besides, pharmacists generally have to know a little of medicine, for every day people consult them in regard to their ailments, and tell their symptoms at the pharmacy. I tell you all this that you may know that I can replace the doctor at need, and since M. Mordicus is not here — he is not even in town, for he was sent for from Paris this morning, I offer my services and am ready to accompany you to M. Martin's, to give my attention to the sick person."

The young boy seemed to reflect, and a mischievous smile played about his lips; at length he answered,—

"Well, monsieur, if you will be so very obliging, I should like you to come with me; you shall see if you can cure our invalid."

M. Postulant cast a glance of triumph on the company; he buttoned his overcoat, looked for his hat, felt his pocket and said,—

"I haven't a single bottle of my elixir about me, and perhaps I shall need to use it. It will hinder us to go to my shop, for it isn't on the way. Madame Grospré, you must have some here; it's not long since I brought you a bottle."

"Yes, yes, I have a phial that has hardly been touched."

"Will you give it to me, and I will replace it by another tomorrow?"

The graceful Phœbe ran to get the bottle of elixir, which she handed to the pharmacist. Then the latter said to the youth, "Go down, young man, I'll be with you." Then pausing at the door of the drawing-room, he turned towards the company, saying,—

"I think I was rather clever there! I shall get to know the person who is sick. I am going to be introduced into this den of bears; I shall spy, I shall observe. Wait here till I come back, for then it is probable I shall be able to acquaint you with some curious things."

"Yes," came the answer from all sides, "we will wait for you here; oh, we shan't stir until you've got back, even if we have to pass the night here."

"All right, that's understood, that's settled."

And M. Postulant ran to rejoin the youth in the blouse, who was already below.

"Do you know," said Madame Postulant, after her husband had gone, "that there is heroism in my husband's action."

"Heroism!" answered Monfignon, "how do you make that out? How can you see any heroism in the fact that a pharmacist goes to see a sick person in default of a doctor? That happens every day."

"But not under the same circumstances, monsieur; in the first place it is night; then this house in the spinach has a very ill name; then he does not know who he is going to. I am sorry that he didn't have his sword cane, but no one can foresee what is going to happen."

"Permit me to observe, madame," said Clémentine, smiling, "that this child who came here — for he is almost a child — does not look at all like a brigand and one might, I should think, follow him without distrust."

"Madame, evil-doers, ill-intentioned people sometimes make use of young people of candid and innocent appearance to entrap those whom they wish to rob."

"Good heavens, if M. Postulant should return to us robbed, how dreadful!"

"Oh, I'm not afraid for him," said Mademoiselle Mignonette, "that young fellow was so nice."

"That's twice already that you've said that!" said Dupétral, kicking that young lady's chair.

"While waiting until M. Postulant comes back," said Monfignon, "which may perhaps be long, for an apothecary may be called on to do a great many things in his office as doctor, if the company desires, I'll finish telling them the adventures of Tartenpomme."

This proposition was welcomed by a murmur so little flattering that to cover it Madame Grospré hastened to say to the poet,—

"No, my dear Monfignon, no; at this moment we are too much occupied with other things, our curiosity is awakened by another subject, and you would find us bad listeners. You must finish Tartenpomme at my first party."

"From which I shall be extremely careful to absent myself," said Dupétral under his breath.

A quarter of an hour passed, then twenty minutes, then twenty-five, and the pharmacist had not returned.

"You may say what you like, but I am uneasy," said Madame Postulant, walking agitatedly about the drawing-room, "and I assure you that if my husband has not returned in the course of half an hour, I shall go in search of him."

"We will go with you, madame," said Dupétral.

"Yes, certainly, we will accompany you," added Monfignon, "but we must take some weapons, because no one knows what may happen."

"How much time does it take to get to this house in the spinach?"

"Why, ten minutes or thereabouts."

"And here he's been gone for more than half an hour, you can see he ought to be back by this time."

Five minutes more passed, when suddenly the drawing-room door opened and M. Postulant appeared.

"Safe! he is safe!" cried his wife.

"I thank thee, my God!" added Dupétral, "we must not forget the words consecrated to the drama."

"Well?—Well, what news?—Whom did you see?—Who is the invalid?—Is he better?" Such were the questions addressed from all sides to the pharmacist, who looked vexed and ill-tempered. He advanced into the middle of the circle and at last exclaimed,—

"The invalid was the donkey, and I saw only the stable. You can understand, then, that I took myself off without asking anything further. Madame Grospré, here is your elixir, it was not needed."

All were in a state of consternation. However, some of them were laughing in their sleeves, and Monfignon was of the number; he was delighted at the misadventure which had happened to the pharmacist.

"From all that I see," said Madame Valbrun, "it seems probable that you will be obliged to go

to M. Frémont again before you learn who this M. Martin is."

"Why no! for as I have told you before, cousin, one cannot place the slightest confidence in what M. Frémont says. When he was asked who this gentleman was for whom he had rented the house in the spinach, he answered to one, 'It is a great personage who is in hiding,' and to another, 'It is some one who has his reasons for wishing to avoid people'; to a third, 'It is a secret which I cannot violate.'"

"To me," said M. Liroquet, "he said in a very singular tone, 'Try to guess.'"

"To me," said the pharmacist, "he answered jokingly, 'You will know posteriorly.'"

"Oh, but I was a little more malicious than the others," said Monfignon, caressing his chin, "I went squarely to Frémont and said to him, 'Your friend in the spinach — no, the individual who has rented the house in the spinach — wears a singular costume; where does he come from with his bandolero's hat?' Then Frémont, who didn't expect to be cornered like that, scratched his ear as he answered me, 'That's what nobody has been able to find out.'"

"You see, fair cousin, that the answers M. Frémont has given have not enlightened us. But in walking past the house in which this M. Martin lives we were not slow to perceive that he is a frightful-looking man."

"Ugly?"

"Not positively — but his manner is that of a veritable ill-licked bear, who passes by a woman with his head turned away, in order not to be obliged to take off his hat."

"He really frightened me," remarked young Madame Breillet, "I had just been reading the 'Mohicans de Paris,' by M. Alexandre Dumas, and I said to myself, 'Oh, this must be one of them.'"

"What I can't understand," said M. Sautrond, "is his wearing trousers in that big plaid, and so enormously wide at the bottom; there's nothing at all to be gained by that. As to his hat, why if that style were to come in I should adopt it at once, it has ever so much more chic than ours."

"Oh, M. Sautrond, don't say that—it's a frightful hat, which almost hides the face."

"I should not pull it down over my eyes as this gentleman does."

"But is he young or old, your M. Martin?" said Madame Valbrun.

"Faith, I don't know."

"I think he's old."

"I think he's young."

"I should take him to be between the two."

"You say he avoids people, but M. Monfignon was telling us, or so it seems to me, that a good many people have been seen to go into his house and that they are not seen to come out."

"That is correct; but we meant to say that he

avoids our people — our society. As to the people who frequent his house, and who no doubt come from Paris, they are very peculiar looking."

"One day I saw a little boy of fourteen or fifteen, in a blouse, go into the house."

"It was the little chap who was here just now."

"No, it was another."

"A little gutter-snipe, I suppose?"

"I can't affirm that he was a gutter-snipe, but he had a very vulgar walk! He was eating cherries as he walked along, and throwing the stones haphazard. When he saw me stop to see him go in, he put out his tongue at me and threw a cherry, which fortunately did not hit me."

"What kind of people can they be, by Jove?"

"I saw a rather pretty dame, who had a big leather bag with a clasp, such as they carry now, and which seemed to contain a good many things. I said to myself, 'Here's a lady who came down by the railway, where can she be going?' She was fairly well dressed. I was walking beside her, and I was about to offer my services, as any gallant man should do who sees a stranger arrive within his gates."

"Well, M. Liroquet, we all know you are a great admirer of the fair sex — what followed?"

"Why, just as I was about to accost the stranger, I heard her singing — and what do you suppose? — the song of the 'Mirliton.'"

"How horrid!"

"Faith, I must confess that stopped me quite short. However, I resumed my walk, and I presently saw the lady enter—"

"The house in the spinach?"

"No, M. Frémont's; but he came out with her, and both of them went into the bear's den."

"A woman who sings 'Mirliton,' what kind of a person can she be, by Jove?"

"Why, in Paris everybody sings that," said Dupétral.

"Oh, the idea, young man, you are not going to get us to believe that in Paris a well-bred woman sings the 'Mirliton' in the streets. I repeat, this Martin receives very doubtful people—I will say further—very suspicious people!"

"And this donkey!" cried Monfignon, "this donkey on which he came back to his house this morning. What is he there for?"

"That they may use him to ride on, probably."

"Certainly, he is almost a mule, he's a magnificent animal. He must be an Arabian donkey."

"Are there Arabian donkeys?"

"Why should there not be? since the horses of that country are renowned. M. Postulant has seen him, he can tell us better than anyone else what he looks like!"

"Thank you, I did not look at him; I came out as fast as I went in."

"In fact," said the young widow, smiling, "none of you have talked with this M. Martin, and you

do not know how he represents himself; you judge only by appearances."

"But it seems to me, my dear cousin, that when people can gather against anyone such a mass of appearances, they may well be allowed to judge."

"Besides, fair lady," said the poet, "how do you suppose anyone is to talk to a gentleman who turns his head away when any one looks at him, or even doubles his pace so as not to be overtaken?"

"I think he has a false nose," said Mademoiselle Mignonette; "one of those noses people put on when they want to disguise themselves."

"Oh, that would be too much of a good thing," said Madame Rifflard, "to make use of a false nose here — where there is nothing false."

"Except hair and teeth and many other shams," whispered Dupétral to Sautrond, who muttered, "They are going to wear pointed shoes again."

They chatted for some time of M. Martin, with whom they were so much taken up that their table for whist or boston was forgotten.

At length they took leave of the contractor and his wife, who looked constrained as she bowed to her cousin, who had said "the little town," in speaking of the place in which she had come to live.

"M. Grospre, did you hear that?"

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY J. W. GRUGEL

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CHAPTER VIII

Nocturnal Fears. A New Remedy for Fainting Fits

One o'clock in the morning had just struck; everybody in the little town had gone to bed, though I will not vouch for it that every one was asleep — I was not there to see. Suddenly a rather singular noise broke the usual quiet of the neighborhood, awoke those who were sleeping, and made those who were already awake open their ears.

Presently the sound, instead of decreasing, increased, people rubbed their eyes and sat up in bed, others got up altogether and went to their windows to endeavor to learn the cause of the noise which disturbed their rest.

"M. Grospré, did you hear that?" said Phœbe, who did not do as the one for whom she was named, and sleep with her sun.

But the sun slept soundly and did not seem at all disposed to answer the moon. The latter grew impatient, and decided to wake the former Hercules by pinching him; he answered by a rather loud grunt and muttered,—

"Well, what is it? what do you want? what are you pinching me for?"

"Good heavens, monsieur, don't you hear anything? There is something extraordinary going on in the town. I think they are beating a general alarm."

"A general alarm! and who is there to beat it? We haven't a garrison here."

"Why, can't the National Guard beat it on his drum?"

"It's burst! he'll have to buy another."

"Oh, listen! it's coming nearer now."

Here, as he turned over, M. Grospré made such a sonorous sound that it nearly covered that of the street, and Phœbe, indignant, quitted the nuptial couch, exclaiming,—

"Ah, that is all you are good for!"

The contractor answered with a few emphatic words rather forceful in their nature, then, instead of getting up, he turned over and went to sleep again.

Madame hurriedly opened the window and leaned out, enjoying the fresh air outdoors.

The night was fine; the moon, half hidden by the clouds, appeared at times to light the ordinarily peaceable streets of the little town; the air was balmy, so that one might place one's self at the window without danger in the simple apparel of a beauty who has just been torn from the sun.

That was the reason so many people were at their windows exchanging words with their neighbors beside them or opposite.

"Did you hear it, neighbor?" said Madame Rifflard, whose house was opposite Grospré's, and who had flung on a wrapper and run to her window.

"Why, good heavens! neighbor, I've heard a good many things — but I can't tell you what they were — that is to say, no — you see me very much upset."

"And I also, I almost overturned my bedside table, for my maid, Monique, woke me very suddenly, shouting to me, 'Madame, there is something going on in the street; they are shouting "Stop!" and then they run.' I said to myself, 'Are they going to have another revolution.' But when one has been four times married one is not easily frightened. So I put on a wrapper and got up. Is M. Grospré asleep, may I ask?"

"My husband — I tried to wake him, but I think he's gone to sleep again, and I swear to you I shan't try to rouse him again. It seems to me the sound has stopped for a moment. I should like, however, to know exactly what it was."

"Wait! listen! there! it's beginning again."

"Oh, yes, good heavens! I can hear the galloping of horses."

"And those shouts! some one said, 'Whoa! whoa! whoa!'"

"Can it be Cossacks?"

"We are not at war with Russia; where do you suppose they'd come from?"

"In 1850 they lodged a good many of them

about here. Cannot some of them have remained hidden in the neighborhood?"

"They would not be young then — they would be much less dangerous."

"The sound is now in the neighboring street. Ah, there's some one in this street now."

"Madame, don't be afraid, it's me — Monfignon."

It was, in fact, that little man, who, in his haste to get up that he might learn the cause of the sound he had heard, had only put on his trousers and a smoking-jacket, around which he had knotted his neckerchief in the form of a belt; he had drawn down his shako on his head without thinking to take off the madras handkerchief he wore as a night-cap, of which the corners hung over his forehead; then, after seizing his National Guard's gun, as he could not put his hand on his sabre, he had taken his tongs and stuck them in his belt, saying to himself, "It is still a firearm!"

Thus equipped, our poet had hastily descended and, his house being minus a porter, had himself opened the small gateway that led into the street; but at the moment when he appeared upon the sill an animal passed at a gallop, pursued by three persons who shouted from time to time,—

"Stop, Anacréon, stop! — oh, the villain! the rogue! we'll give it to him! — Is he going to make us run all night? — Stop! — Oh, the scoundrel! — Stop! — If we could only frighten him!"

These words were followed and accompanied by great shouts of laughter and clappings of hands, and all this passed very rapidly.

On seeing the animal fly past at a gallop, on perceiving the men who were following him and shouting, Monfignon quickly took two steps backward and shut his gate again. When the sounds had drawn to a distance, he had reopened his door, bravely left his dwelling, and after being assured that there was no longer anybody in the street he dashed down it shouting,—

"Help! to arms! the village is full of robbers on horseback. Awaken, my dear citizens, don't allow yourselves to be surprised in your sleep."

And thus the little man had arrived in front of Mesdames Grospré and Rifflard's windows.

"What is the matter, my dear Monfignon? Pray, tell us?" said the Widow Rifflard, leaning outside her window with so much abandon that her attire became very unconventionally disordered.

"What is the matter, mesdames? I don't want to frighten you, but there is some danger, a good deal of danger!"

"Good God! I suspected it!"

"A band of brigands on horseback are coursing all over the village at a fast gallop, doubtless intending to put all to the fire and sword."

"Oh! oh! and you saw them—the wretches?"

"Yes, just as I opened my gate the troop passed before me, vociferating, shouting, howling!"

"Were there many of them?"

"I had not time to count them — they ran so fast, but from the noise they made I should say there were about twenty of them."

"We are lost! brave M. Monfignon, you dared to come out — had no fear in exposing yourself."

"Yes, I had no fear whatever, but I should like some re-enforcements; I can't make headway alone against a horde of bandits. Awaken M. Grospré, he is solid and tall."

"Oh, I shan't try to wake my husband again, I've already tried once, thank you; I know how he answered me— I don't want to expose myself to hearing such language again. M. Grospré is not as solid as you think."

"But," said Madame Rifflard, "if these bandits had the intention of surprising us in our sleep, why did they make noise enough to awaken the whole country side?"

"That must be one of their tactics, they must have an object. Ah, here is some one — Who goes there?"

"What do you mean by who goes there? who goes there, yourself? Answer, or I'll fire!"

So saying, M. Postulant, in a short jacket and nightcap, debouched from the neighboring street, bearing, instead of a gun, an immense syringe which he had loaded not with powder, but with linseed water, with which his pharmacy was always abundantly provided in case of unforeseen need.

"Why, it is M. Postulant!" cried the little man, slightly reassured. "Have you seen the malefactors?"

"I have seen nobody, but I heard you shouting, 'Help! to arms!' then I got up, much against my wife's wishes, she did not want me to come out."

"And was it with that hygienic instrument that you were going to fire?"

"By Jove! I took the first thing that came to my hand — it isn't so heavy as a pestle. There are some robbers, then? Where are they?"

"They're going all over the village at a gallop."

"Galloping! why that's very singular."

"They must have awakened the mayor."

"The mayor isn't here, he has gone to pass three days in Paris, to learn to play on a billiard table without pockets."

"But I've heard nothing at all myself; I think you must have been dreaming of robbers, M. Monfignon."

"Dreaming! dreaming! why, ask these ladies if they have not heard the noise made by the scoundrels?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Oh, I've heard a good many things," said Phœbe, raising her eyes to heaven.

At this moment precipitate steps were heard at the end of the street, M. Monfignon presented the bayonet, and the pharmacist got ready to push the piston of his syringe.

"Who goes there? Who is it?" cried the two sentinels almost at the same moment, while Madame Rifflard, who, wishing to help her defenders, had brought two copper saucepans began to beat them one against the other, exactly as though she was playing cymbals, preluding this music with the most energetic swearing! A trembling voice answered,—

"Don't fire! in the name of heaven! It's a friend — it's me, Liroquet."

"It's M. Liroquet. Advance at the word of command, seeing it's you."

The old bachelor was attired in a still more startling manner than the two persons whom he had joined. In his excitement, and greatly frightened by M. Monfignon's call to arms, he had forgotten to put on his trousers, but had tied an apron belonging to his maid before him, and put on his head the cap with lappets which she habitually wore; then he had thrown a mantle over his shoulders and taken his sword cane, which he carried like a lance.

How the maid's cap and apron came to be in M. Liroquet's sleeping-room is a mystery which we will not try to fathom.

The old bachelor was so frightened that he could hardly speak.

"Messieurs — my dear friends," he managed to gasp at length, "do you know the nature of the peril which threatens us?"

"We know that some vagabonds are galloping

about our town and their intentions cannot but be evil."

"Wait!" cried the pharmacist, "M. Liroquet is disguised as a woman!"

"Do you think so? By Jove, in my hurry I put the first thing I found on my head. Messieurs, the band passed through my street and do you know what they left on their passage? — fire."

"Fire!"

"Yes, yes, fire! I saw it on the ground. They are going to set fire to the town that later on, in the confusion, they may rob us."

"Well, by all the pigs!"

"Boom!"

It was Madame Rifflard, who, on learning that they were going to set fire to the place, had banged her two saucepans, which produced such a piercing, prolonged sound that they thought it was the tocsin they heard. Madame Grospré uttered a terrible cry. The three men who were in the street jumped to their feet; Monfignon dropped his gun. M. Liroquet lost his maid's cap, and M. Postulant, having involuntarily pushed the piston of his syringe, sent a jet of linseed water on the fair Phœbe.

"Good God! is that that noise again?" said Monfignon, picking up his gun. "Are they firing a cannon?"

"No, no, it's me with my saucepans," said Madame Rifflard. "I did that to frighten the brigands if they drew nearer."

"Why, that's a very good idea, you could awaken a greater part of the town with that—it is so like the tocsin that I was deceived myself."

"And when everybody is awake the brigands will not dare to set fire to us all and to everything."

"Fire!" said Madame Grospré, wiping away the effects of M. Postulant's fusillade. "Why, I can't understand it at all. I'm all wet."

"Madame Rifflard, a few more bangs of your saucepans, that will infallibly bring re-enforcements."

"Willingly, messieurs, willingly. Oh, you shall see how I can play them."

The female Bluebeard clashed her kitchen furniture, after the manner of cymbals, with so much ardor that she produced a truly frightful noise. Numbers of the townspeople came running up, the women in short skirts, the men in jackets and bathing-drawers; fortunately it was summer time, or some of these imprudent folk might have contracted inflammation of the lungs. The noise was so loud that this time it awakened the former contractor, who exclaimed,—

"They are going to give us a charivari now, and to what end? we are not newly married?"

"That we certainly are not," said Phœbe, "and they needn't deceive themselves about that."

Monfignon, delighted at seeing people gather, got ready to place them chevaux de frise in the middle of the road, but the uproar Madame Rifflard

was making prevented their hearing his orders; he shouted to that lady to cease the wielding of her saucepans; but the widow did not hear the poet, and continued to produce the music with a vigor which proved her worthy of a place as cymbalist in the orchestra at the "Cirque."

Shouts of laughter changed the complexion of affairs; it was big Dupétral, who was holding his sides as he viewed these gentlemen's costumes.

"Why, what the devil is the matter with you all here?" said he. "What's the meaning of the racket Madame Rifflard is making at this window? She seems to be calling everybody to witness a performance, as the mountebanks do. And this gun, this syringe, these fetching costumes — ha, ha, ha, ha! It's not carnival time already, is it?"

"Young man, don't laugh! There is nothing to laugh at in this," answered Monfignon, pushing his shako and the ends of his madras back. "You, no doubt, are ignorant of the fact that certain incendiaries are going all over the village on horseback strewing fire on their way."

"Incendiaries! Here? Where did you see them? I've seen nobody but the tenant of the house in the spinach, this M. Martin, who, accompanied by two of his friends, was in pursuit of his donkey, who had escaped from the temporary shed where they had put him and was amusing himself by galloping about the country. I don't know what remedy M. Postulant administered to this donkey, but it

has had the same effect as if they had built a fire under him."

These words dissipated the fear that had been expressed on all the faces. Madame Rifflard herself ceased her whacking of the saucepans to listen to it.

"But this fire, monsieur, this fire they leave on their tracks?" exclaimed M. Liroquet, "I saw it on the ground myself."

"As these gentlemen were smoking cigars when running after the donkey, they may have thrown some of the stubs, still burning, on the path, smokers frequently do so."

This explanation put to flight the last remnants of the terror felt by the persons who had come running at the sound of the saucepans. Men and women returned to their beds, saying,—

"And this M. Monfignon, shouting, 'Help! to arms!' was it to make game of us that he did it?"

"Let him call for help another time, and he'll see whether I bother myself."

"All the same, that old Liroquet was very droll with his kitchen apron and his cape."

"And he had his maid's cap on for a nightcap."

"His maid's cap? Well, well, the old rip! He must have found it close to his hand, then."

"So it would seem. And M. Postulant with his syringe — he's the fellow that always wants to be at his trade."

The three persons whom this discourse concerned did not seem to hear anything of it, and remained

in the street, allowing the people to disperse. Besides, Monfignon refused to place any faith in young Dupétral's explanations. He continued to walk up and down, with his gun over his shoulder, between Grospré's house and that of Madame Rifflard, saying,—

"That coin won't pass muster with me; they can't make me believe that was only a donkey making all that noise with its galloping. M. Dupétral may settle it all as he pleases; but I shall only be convinced when I have had what you may call a good view of the delinquents."

"Well, you will soon be satisfied," said young Dupétral, "for here's the donkey himself galloping along towards here — it seems they haven't yet managed to catch him."

The sound of the galloping of an animal made M. Liroquet tremble again; but Monfignon, who, thanks to the moon, saw that it really was nothing but a donkey, placed himself in the middle of the road and held his gun across, exclaiming,—

"Hang it! I'll stop this cursed animal that's disturbing our sleep. I'll show these gentleman that alone I am more adroit than the whole three of them."

The situation was palpitating with interest. M. Liroquet and the pharmacist glued themselves against the house, the latter still holding his novel weapon point out; the mayor's young clerk stood laughing on the other side of the road; the two

ladies, Madame Grospré and Madame Rifflard, were at their window, their bodies leaning out and the widow still holding in her hand the saucepans upon which she had played with so much effect; finally, in the middle of the street was Monfignon, at first standing upright with gun across, but then he stooped, and kept lowering himself as the donkey approached, so that when the animal got within two steps of him he was extended motionless, at full length, and flat on his face, on the ground. Madame Rifflard, in an excess of zeal, believing the poet in danger, suddenly banged her saucepans together, hoping that would frighten and stop the donkey. This unexpected noise, in fact, did frighten the animal, but, instead of stopping him, it inspired him with new vigor and he jumped over Monfignon as he lay flattened out on the pavement.

Presently the three persons who were pursuing Anacréon came running also, and also jumped lightly over the gentleman extended in the street, but very carefully so as not to touch him.

"Oh, is that how you stop donkeys," said Dupétral, approaching the little man, "it was hardly worth while to place yourself in the street for them to play at leap frog over you."

Monfignon did not budge, and answered not a word.

"Good God! he is hurt!" exclaimed Postulant and Liroquet.

"Hurt," said both ladies in their turn. "Wait, we will come down, we will come and lend him our assistance."

"Bring some of my elixir, if you have it," said Postulant, "I'll make him swallow a few drops, that will bring him to at once."

"Why, he can't be hurt," said Dupétral, "I watched the donkey — he jumped like a hunter, and did not touch him."

The two ladies arrived in a negligé allowable under the circumstances. Phœbe held under her arm a bottle of eau de cologne, a flask of vinegar, and in her hand a phial of balsam water. The Widow Rifflard also arrived in haste with a bottle of anisette and a pumice stone, and with a big piece of Roquefort cheese wrapped up in a piece of paper.

They surrounded the little man, who obstinately remained on his stomach, Madame Grospré sprinkled him with eau de cologne; Madame Rifflard flitted around him, offering to rub him with her pumice stone, and M. Postulant continued to ejaculate,—

"He must have some of my elixir. Ah, if we had some of my elixir he would be all right by now."

But Dupétral, who had approached Madame Rifflard, suddenly cried,—

"Why, madame, what have you in that paper? it smells infernally strong."

"Good heavens, I don't know, I took anything

I could find, I thought there was camphor in the paper."

"No, it was not camphor. Permit me, madame."

Dupétral took the paper, unwrapped it, and perceived a piece of maggoty Roquefort cheese. He burst into a shout of laughter, then, approaching the little man, he pushed aside Phœbe, who was doggedly flooding the unfortunate poet with eau de cologne, saying as he did so,—

"Pardon me, madame, but I think I may be more successful."

And half raising Monfignon's head, he placed on the ground, right under the little man's nose, the piece of Roquefort cheese. Almost immediately the poet rose to a kneeling posture, exclaiming,—

"Jove! what's this they've put under my nose? It's shocking, it's poisonous! ah, pouah! Take it away quick, I beg of you, it's much worse than chlorine."

"You see I was right in making use of this cheese, for it has suddenly restored your speech!"

"Cheese! to use cheese to recover any one from a fainting fit — ah, for shame! it is not poetical."

"That is possible; but it is energetic, for the effect was electrical."

"Are you hurt, my dear Monfignon?"

"I don't know — but I must be, madame."

"Whereabouts, my dear friend."

"By Jove! it's my left side that pains me. Ow! That donkey must have stepped on me."

"Why, no, he didn't touch you; he jumped over you all right."

"Then it must have been those blackguards that struck me."

"Nor they either, I was watching them."

"Well, I feel sure my left side is badly hurt."

Monfignon turned over and they saw the pair of tongs, which had slipped from his belt into his trousers, and turned so as to present themselves at right angles to his side.

"Hang it, if you fell on those things it is not surprising that you are hurt," said Dupétral. "But what was your idea in taking this chimney furniture?"

"Good God! I couldn't find my sabre — so I took those, that I might have something in my belt. In fact, I think it was those that hurt my side. All the same I should like to be in my bed — but I don't know if I can walk. Those tongs have made me lame on one side.

"I'll lend you an arm, and take you to your place," said Dupétral.

"By Jove! that's not to be refused. Oh, mesdames, what a terrible night! and this cursed Martin is the cause of it all, too — for him or his donkey, it is all the same thing."

"Go back to bed, my poor Monfignon; I am of the opinion that tomorrow a complaint should be laid before the mayor, relative to the disorder that this gentleman's donkey has caused in our neighborhood."

"But the mayor has gone to Paris to learn to play billiards without pockets."

"Then we must address ourselves to the assistant mayor."

"He was vaccinated yesterday and he's in bed."

"What, vaccinated? a man of forty-five? Hasn't he been vaccinated before?"

"Yes, of course; but they revaccinate people — it is the fashion now."

"Good-night, go to bed — take a good perspiration. Oh, what a night!"

"Good-night, mesdames. Messieurs Postulant and Liroquet have already gone in."

"It was time," said Dupétral; "M. Liroquet was losing his apron!"

The ladies entered their houses with bag and baggage, and Monfignon reached his domicile, hobbling as best he could and leaning on the arm of the mayor's young clerk; the latter had put the piece of Roquefort in his pocket, saying,—

"It smells villanous, so it must be good!"

CHAPTER IX

A Gust of Wind. Beneath a Tree. Tongues Wag

The events of the night made the subject of all the conversations of the next day; but each one told them differently — there were no two stories alike. For people who like to gossip it is so agreeable to have a subject on which one can embroider.

Monfignon kept his bed for three days, owing to the injury he had inflicted on himself with the tongs. His hatred for M. Martin reached such a pitch as to cause him to deliver himself of a four-line verse, which he determined to recite to every one as soon as he could go out.

The quatrain was composed as follows,—

A stranger, with his donkey steed,
Within our walls has come to find,
What? — May I be damned indeed,
But I'll prevent him,— change his mind.

This verse was thought superb. Madame Rifflard learned it and taught it to her maid. Mademoiselle Mignonette repeated it all day long to her uncle; but M. Boulingrin did not like it, and answered his niece,—

"How's he going to prevent a thing, your poet,

since he doesn't know what it is? His verse is not clear at all."

"Why, uncle, it is a satire against this gentleman and his donkey."

"That doesn't better it."

And M. Dupétral said, laughing, "This poor M. Monfignon, he could not prevent M. Martin's donkey from jumping over him, nor all those who were after the animal. His verse is mere brag and bluster."

Madame Valbrun, whose room did not face on the street, had remained quietly in her bed while everybody was in a state of disorder. She had heard much coming and going, and the melody of the saucepans had reached her ear, but she knew she was in the midst of a little population who made a good deal of noise for a very little thing; she had, therefore, waited peacefully until the next day to learn the cause of the nocturnal noise.

The tender Phœbe did not fail, when relating the events of the night, to vaunt the bravery of Monfignon, who, said she, had laid himself across the street to stop the donkey and those who pursued him, a plan in which he would have succeeded but for a pair of tongs which embarrassed the poet in his movements.

Madame Rifflard amplified again on the perils to which Monfignon was exposed, and each one of these ladies in ending her recital invariably bestowed something that was not a blessing on the tenant of

the house in the spinach, as being the primary cause of all the disorder.

When a lady hears a good deal of evil said of anyone, when every day people hark back to the same subject and overwhelm the same person, rest assured that that will give this lady the liveliest desire to know her or him who attracts the general hatred. The desire must necessarily be more pronounced when it is a gentleman who is in question.

Clémentine would not have been a woman had she not experienced this feeling of curiosity, and, without positively confessing her desire, when she went out walking in the neighborhood, carrying a book for company, a society which she preferred to many others, she involuntarily turned her steps in the direction of the famous house in the spinach, where an Englishman had hung himself, thanks to the touching thoughtfulness of his servant.

To excuse her curiosity, Madame Valbrun might have said to those she met that this part of the country offered to any one walking about it the most agreeable points of view, the pleasantest sites; that cousin Grospré's garden was delightful, but that one did not live in the country to shut one's self up in a garden daily; that, besides, when the former contractor was there with his friends there was no further means of reading there in peace, these gentlemen having the habit of seasoning their conversation with shouts of laughter, capable of putting Madame Rifflard's cymbals to shame.

As for that, Madame Valbrun would not have said all that; she had the good habit of doing as she pleased without making herself uneasy about what people to whom she was indifferent might say of her, and she was perfectly right. To fear that evil will be said of one is the sign of a weak mind, people of spirit hold themselves above many habits and customs which are respected only by fools and hypocrites; these latter often do things a hundred times worse than those for which they blame other people; but they have one great talent, that of saving appearances, the curtain under which so many things may be hidden, but one must be very careful to keep the curtain constantly closed. Clémentine was walking, then, in the country, her book wide open in her hand, but not keeping her eyes very assiduously upon it. She passed the house inhabited by this gentlemen with whom the whole country was occupied, she had looked at that mysterious dwelling and had seen nothing extraordinary there; the shutters on the ground-floor were closed in truth, but on the first floor all the venetian blinds were open.

The young widow passed the house and turned towards a small clump of trees not very close together but still sufficiently so to afford a little shade, where she might rest for a moment. The weather, which at first had been fine, began to change. A very strong wind arose; it could not produce dust in the fields of spinach, but it violently agitated the

branches of the trees towards which our walker was directing her steps.

Clémentine was not more than a hundred steps from the little wood when a violent gust of wind carried off her wide-brimmed straw hat, such as ladies had the habit of wearing in the country, and which should have been tied under the chin; but it was so fine when she set out on her walk that she could not foresee that horrid gust of wind and was it not more graceful to allow the broad pink ribbon strings to float? Such an event always happens so suddenly that one's hat is blown to a distance before one is aware that he is bareheaded. The young woman had only felt that her hair was disarranged; she had put her hands to her head, but her hat, still carried by the wind, was skimming along twenty steps from her; then she tried to catch it, but the wind was too quick for her and the hat still flew; then, just as she hoped to reach it, a still more violent gust of wind puffed under the crown and sent it up into the air like a paper kite, then let it down, not to the ground, but on to a rather high branch of a walnut tree which marked the limits of one of the spinach fields.

"Goodness! it is there to stay now!" said Madame Valbrun, in a tragi-comic tone and looking with a piteous expression at her pretty straw hat, the fine pink ribbons of which were rolled around a branch, which seemed proud of carrying this fresh adornment. And naturally the lady looked around

from one side to the other, to see if she could perceive one of those small urchins who swarm in the country and climb trees as easily as they go up a staircase. But no, there was not one of those little rascals in sight, though they seem to spring out of the ground when you wish to be alone. It is like the cabs when it rains; the moment one needs them one can't find one.

Then the young woman sadly carried her glances towards the branch of the walnut tree which held her hat; but what a surprise! a man was on that branch; not without danger he reached the hat, which was hung quite at the end of the limb, he detached it cautiously and took it carefully so as not to spoil it in getting down from the tree, and at last reached the ground and went quickly towards Clémentine, to whom he presented the fragile article, saying with infinite politeness,—

"Here it is, madame; I venture to hope that nothing vexatious has happened to it in its flight."

Madame Valbrun, very pleased at re-entering into the possession of her hat, first thanked the one who had restored it to her, then she quickly put it on her head again, because the wind had blown her hair about, and she feared it looked untidy, and after having retied the ribbons she looked again at the person who had recovered her hat; while examining the gentleman, who had on a brown holland blouse, wide plaid trousers, a gray hat with a pointed crown and wide brim, she said to herself,—

"Why, that is how they pictured this M. Martin's costume to me; yes, that is exactly it; but they said also that this gentleman had a frightful face and that is not so at all. He wears a beard, it is true, but in Paris even that is not a rare thing, and is seen with men who are unexceptionable. Despite this black beard, which is very abundant, it seems to me this gentleman is not bad-looking, that he is young, and that he has a very distinguished appearance."

A glance had sufficed to call forth all these reflections from Clémentine, for we men hardly suspect all that a woman can seize and observe at a single glance of the eye; they probably have something in their pupils that nature has omitted to put in ours. And as she thought all this, Madame Valbrun, after putting on her hat, said to the gentleman,—

"I was extremely fortunate, monsieur, in finding you here, and I am truly grateful for what you have done; for my hat was lodged far above my reach, quite at the end of a branch that did not appear to me to be very strong, so that it was dangerous to go out on it."

"By Jove, madame, I didn't notice all that. I saw your hat caught on a branch,— I was quite sure you had not put it there, and that the wind had served you a bad turn. So I hurriedly climbed the tree in order to return quickly to you — that which becomes you so well. I am persuaded there

is not a man, unless he were a gouty person, who would not have done as much."

This answer had been given in that tone of perfect breeding and with that facility which betokens knowledge of the world; the little compliment which had slipped in had been uttered in so natural a manner, that one could not but believe that it was simply a fact.

How could one reconcile the breeding, the politeness of this gentleman with all the horrors they told of M. Martin? It was at this point that Clémentine said to herself, "But, perhaps it is not he." And naturally she had wished to assure herself of this. So she resumed,—

"Monsieur, you do not wish me to thank you for what you have done, but you must, at least, allow me to thank the chance that caused you to walk this way just in time to come to my help."

"By Jove! madame, there was no chance in it, for, for some weeks past, I have lived in the house you see there — all alone, to the left."

"What, monsieur, do you live in the house—"

"In the spinach —yes, madame, I know they've given it this nickname, as well as that of the 'house of the hanged man,' for they are very fertile in nicknames in this country."

"Then, you are— M. Martin?"

The man in the blouse bowed smiling, and answered,—

"Yes, I am certainly he."

"Ah, monsieur, if you did but know the interest you inspire in this little town; but no doubt you do not for a moment suspect the effect you have produced, the uneasiness, the terror, even, which you have caused its inhabitants."

"What, madame, does it reach the point of terror? I did not think I was so frightful. Why, what have I done to cause these provincials uneasiness? — an uneasiness which you do not share, I venture to hope, madame."

"How do you know I am not one of them, monsieur?"

"Why, I know that you are a Parisian — that you have been in this part of the country but a short time, and that very probably you have no intention of settling yourself here."

"Oh, you know all that? For one who seems to shun the society of the neighborhood, it seems to me that you are well-informed."

"My friend Frémont, who rented this country-house for me, was quite willing to give me some details as to the natives, their manners and customs, and I must confess to you, madame, that it was this that induced me to avoid all intercourse with them. I know that generally the people who live in small towns are curious, gossiping, suspicious, and indiscreet; and my friend Frémont warned me that in this place they were worse than elsewhere. Having rented this house that I might enjoy the rest and quiet afforded by a sojourn in

the country — and work at my ease, in order to avoid, above all things, bores and hinderers, I agreed in my own mind that I would avoid any connection with the people of the neighborhood; but I never thought that my residence here would cause them fear."

"Monsieur, it wasn't exactly your residence here that caused them fear—it was—But, really, I don't know that I ought to tell you all the extravagances they uttered on your account."

"Oh, tell me, madame; I assure you, it will amuse me very greatly."

And the bearded gentleman, assuming the serious air with which poor Grassot used to set a whole assemblage laughing, said,—

"I am prepared for all, madame; they think I am a brigand chief?"

"Not altogether, monsieur."

"Not altogether! I am only a simple robber, then?"

"Please, monsieur, let me tell you in order."

"Pardon, madame — but I'm keeping you standing here. It seems to me we can talk better seated under that big tree which was so fortunate as to bear your bonnet for some moments; that is to say, if you are not afraid of compromising yourself by sitting beside me."

Madame Valbrun smiled as she went towards the verdurous slope which formed a natural bank, and said to the gentleman in the blouse,—

"I think, in fact, that few of the ladies of the town would dare to seat themselves beside you — but, as you have said, I am not a native."

The young widow and this gentleman seated themselves under the big tree. Clémentine already chatted with M. Martin as though she had known him for a long time; these two people immediately understood and suited each other; they had divined that they were of the same world, and it was not that of the little town.

"Monsieur," said Clémentine, "if you will allow me, I will proceed in due course."

"Just as you like, madame."

"I'll begin: In the first place, when you came to this part of the country you did not call upon the principal people in the neighborhood — that's the first grievance."

"That is correct; but as I desired intimacy with no one, I did not see the necessity of paying visits."

"Secondly: your — good heavens! I don't know that I dare tell you that."

"I beg of you, tell me everything, madame."

"Well, then, monsieur, there was something original in your costume, which at first seemed quite extraordinary to these people, who are not aware that in Paris every one dresses as he pleases — provided modesty is not shocked."

"And it seems to me, madame, that in my dress there is nothing that could shock the strictest modesty."

"Most assuredly not, monsieur."

"Is it because I wear a blouse, then? Why, I thought that in the country it was not customary to put on a coat to water one's garden or pull out wire grass."

"Oh, it was not your blouse that offended, it was your large, gray felt hat with wide, turned-up brim — it made a sensation, for they had never seen one like it before in the country."

"I am delighted that my hat produced such an effect."

"What is more, you pull it down a little over your eyes, which hardly permits your face to be seen, and that made everyone think that you had a forbidding, ferocious, frightful visage."

"All this is very amusing; do go on, madame."

"Then, they noticed that you always kept the shutters of your groundfloor closed."

"That is the truth, madame, for I had noticed that my house was constantly surrounded by promenaders or, rather, curious people, who did not pass quietly on their way, but made every effort to see into the interior. As I have always detested the curious I closed my shutters to catch them. There came among others a little man who always looked as though he came out of a band-box, who one day was glued against the wall of my house to try to hear what was being said on the first floor, of which the windows were open; two young men who were with me, having perceived

this gentleman's manœuvres, amused themselves by emptying over him the contents of a washbowl — and I approved their action."

"I've heard that anecdote. You made a great enemy of M. Monfignon thereby."

"Oh, is that the name of the little man? And what does this M. Monfignon do?"

"He lives on his income, and does nothing but write verses — for his own amusement."

"I understand, and not for that of society."

"Also, monsieur, you now have a donkey."

"That is true, too; it's very convenient for me to get about the country, and then I'm very fond of riding donkey-back. Each one takes his pleasure where he finds it; and that is a very innocent one."

"Of course it is. But some days ago did not your donkey get away? Did he not come galloping into the town, and that in the middle of the night? You pursued him with other persons, shouting to try and make him stop. It made a great deal of noise. You woke part of the inhabitants of the town, a great noise, shouts, a gallop in the middle of the night! it doesn't take much to cause extreme terror to people who are not accustomed to hear even a four-wheeler at night."

"Madame, I wasn't to blame for that at all. My donkey escaped from the temporary shed where I had put him. He ran to the town, and naturally we ran after him, but he's a spirited fellow and he trots well, so he led us a fine chase."

"The townspeople heard shouts and then a galloping; they thought some brigands, some incendiaries were coming to set fire to the town, for they found fire in your tracks."

"Ends of cigars still burning, probably."

"In short, your donkey hurt M. Monfignon who was lying all across the road to stop him."

"M. Monfignon again! What! was he the gentleman who was lying on his face on the ground, and whom we jumped over, I and those who accompanied me? Why, he assumed a singular position for stopping donkeys. I am certain, as far as that goes, that Anacréon — that is the name of my donkey — did not touch the gentleman."

"To tell you the truth he was hurt by some tongs that he had placed at his side in place of a sabre!"

M. Martin laughed heartily on hearing that this gentleman had equipped himself with the tongs, and Madame Valbrun could not help sharing his hilarity.

"And is that all, madame?" said this bearded young man presently.

"Why, yes, I think so, monsieur; don't you think that is enough?"

"By Jove, no! for it is very amusing! By the way, Frémont had warned me and I expected a little something like that — but I didn't think it would be quite so funny."

"Oh, wait, monsieur, there is something else yet."

"Let us hear it, madame."

"M. Monfignon has composed a verse of four lines about you, and almost everyone in the town has learned it by heart."

"Please, madame, place me at the advantage of knowing what every one else knows; a quatrain by M. Monfignon, that is worthy of being learned by heart, must have much merit. You know it, I hope?"

"Yes, monsieur, this is the verse,—

A stranger, with his donkey steed,
Within our walls has come to find,
What? — May I be damned indeed,
But I'll prevent him! — change his mind."

"Ha! ha! how deliriously enchanting. I thank you, indeed, madame, for having made me acquainted with this touching quatrain; it is full of Attic salt, and my donkey figures very happily therein. This little sample gives me a very good idea of the talents of the poet of the neighborhood. Madame, excuse my curiosity, but may I ask how it is that you, who are formed to be greatly sought after in Paris — oh, that is not a compliment, it is a simple reflection, that you should come to retire into a little town of which the inhabitants seem to me so far behind the times?"

"Monsieur, one must sometimes depart from his usual customs to return to them later with increased pleasure. I have a cousin who is married to one of the notable men of this town. For a

long time past she has begged me to come and pass some time with her, I have done so and I do not regret it. I see a society that is quite novel to me, it interests me and gives me a knowledge of these provincials. I have already passed some time in the country, where I saw peasants only; I recognized, with disappointment, the fact that those children of nature were in general wicked, envious, always complaining, always saying evil of the rich — and to peasants all these bourgeois are rich — and in their commercial relations with each other seeking only to outwit and deceive each other. Now I can also appreciate these provincials. I do not call thus the dwellers in the large towns, such as Lyons, Rouen, Bordeaux and many others; but I speak of the inhabitants of a little town, and if I must judge by those with whom I now come in contact, I am again obliged to recognize that they are gossiping, curious, slanderous, suspicious and ridiculous in their pretensions to good form, of which they have no conception; because good form does not consist in sitting very upright, being formal in company and sitting in a circle in a drawing-room. To sum up, Paris is a hundred times better than this place; there one may do as one pleases, may dress or not dress without one's neighbors finding anything to say. There, people are agreeable, cheerful, sometimes witty and always charitable. Therefore, I am looking forward to my return there."

"Soon, madame?"

Clémentine looked at this gentleman, whose question was rather indiscreet, considering the length of their acquaintance. He perceived that he had been too quick and he hastened to resume,—

"Forgive me, madame, I should not have allowed myself to ask you such a question; but this conversation has given me such pleasure that you do not know how much I should like to meet you again."

Madame Valbrun rose, saying, "I will excuse you, monsieur, and, as for me, if any one attacks you again I shall be delighted that I can defend you and tell them that you are not so formidable as they believe."

"You are very good, madame; then I—may I not know whether you will walk past here sometimes?"

The young woman smiled as she answered,—

"Really, monsieur, how can I tell you? I go out walking sometimes, but I shall not go out again in such a high wind."

"You have a grudge against the wind, madame, while I bless it, since I owe to it the moments I have passed near you."

Clémentine answered this compliment only by a gracious bow, then she departed, saying as she went,—

"He is very agreeable — has very good manners. Something tells me he is an artist. I did

not speak to him of the lady who went to his house singing the song of 'Mirliton' — because — because, after all, that did not concern me!"

And the young widow continued her way towards the town without seeing a little man who had been watching her sitting under a tree chatting with M. Martin, and who, delighted at his discovery, had run off at the top of his speed when he saw Clémentine rise, and in his hurry to get to the Grosprés' before her he had spread himself at full length in a bed of spinach, in the midst of which he looked as though he were swimming.

"It's exactly as I have had the honor of telling you," repeated Monfignon, who, after picking himself up had set off running again and had reached the Grosprés' all out of breath.

"Come, it isn't possible; you must be mistaken — it wasn't my cousin you saw."

"It was really your cousin, your beautiful cousin, as you call her. This will prove to you whether it was her or not. She had on a white gown sprigged with little clusters of violets — a big straw hat with pink ribbons, and a little silk shawl, also violet."

"That is the dress she wore today. And she was talking with that man who owns the donkey?"

"She was talking with him — very familiarly; they were both seated under a big tree on a grassy bank, in a rather lonely spot, and were gazing into each other's eyes. The gentleman's left hand rested on Madame Valbrun's right knee."

"You are sure of it?"

"I should think I was sure. As to his right hand, I do not know where it was, I can't say precisely."

"This becomes formidable — and they did not see you."

"No, really! they were too much occupied with what they were saying. Had a thunderbolt fallen at their feet it would not have disturbed them."

"Did it go so far as that?"

"It was as I say, oh, the conversation was very warm and animated."

"And what were they saying?"

"What were they saying? I could hear only a few things, some broken sentences, because I could not stay too near them for fear of being seen, but I caught these words quite plainly, 'I shall go out when the wind has stopped blowing.' It was Madame Valbrun who said that. To which the man answered, 'Bless you! I owe all my happiness to you. How sweet are the moments I have spent near you' — later on, I believe, he added, 'I shall love you for ever,' and he kissed her hands."

"I can't get over it! No, really, M. Monfignon, as you see, I am stupefied by what you have just told me. What! my cousin, she who was so well brought up, a widow whose conduct has never given cause for the slightest gossip."

"There is a beginning to everything!"

"An intrigue with such an ill-famed individual.

Why, she must have known him in Paris then? for otherwise they could not be so intimate already."

"I do not know what to say to you. But just recall the fact that whenever anybody spoke of this M. Martin to say of him — that which he deserved — your cousin kept silent, smiling with a mocking expression — or if she said anything it was always to take the part of this intruder."

"Yes, I have noticed that; it has even struck me."

"Madame Rifflard has made the same reflections. And that night — that famous night when everybody got up to learn the cause of the noise in the street, your cousin did not stir; she stayed quietly in her room. Was she forewarned that there would be a noise in the night? if not I ask you would she not have done as everybody else did, would she not have got up to inform herself, at least, of what was going on?"

"Your reflection is luminous! that is self-evident. Everybody was up and about the house, she being the single exception. That she was forewarned is as clear as that two and two make four. Then she knows this Martin; there is no further doubt. And, now I remember it, for more than two years past I have been writing to Madame Valbrun, inviting her to come and spend some time here, but she never would do so. Then, behold, she arrives here four weeks or thereabouts after this Martin has rented the house in the spinach."

"All that is easily seen by those who are not blind. It is an intrigue which must have begun in Paris; but there, probably, they were observed — he might have jealous eyes about him."

"Who knows? this Martin is perhaps married."

"That is highly probable. If he were not he would not enshroud himself in so much mystery."

"He would not wear a hat with a brim wide enough to hide part of his face. He's married, I would wager anything on it. Then they must have said, 'Let us leave Paris, let us give ourselves up to our love far from jealous glances — in some little provincial town. You start first (they are familiar enough in conversation, no doubt, when they are alone), you start first; you will rent a very isolated house, far from any others; then, I will come down later on. Wait! I have a relative in just such a neighborhood. You will go and settle yourself there and I will go to my relative's afterwards, that will seem quite natural and will not give rise to the slightest suspicion.'"

"Yes, yes, that is it. Everything is entwined, and now I remember several singular circumstances to which I paid not the slightest attention. I was so far from suspecting. For instance, my cousin has asked me for a key to the gate that leads to the street. I said to her, 'What do you want it for?' and she answered me, 'In the country, I sometimes get up very early; then I like to go out and take a walk in the fields.' I said to her, 'The

maid will open it for you.' 'I don't wish to awaken your maid.' 'Well,' resumed I, 'the gardener gets up early too.' 'Your gardener is deaf, he never hears me when I speak to him.' In short, her insistence was such that I ended in giving her the key!"

"How imprudent! Rest assured that this key was not asked of you without intention. This fair Parisian goes out early in the morning, perhaps at night. And who knows whether she does not bring her lover into your house."

"Why, that would be odious — frightful! for my house to become the centre of a criminal intrigue. My dear Monfignon, this idea upsets me. And wait — I remember now, yesterday morning Clémentine did not come down at breakfast-time — that comes back to me."

"Hang it, when one looks for them, proofs thicken."

"I said to Cunegonde, my maid, 'Go and see where my cousin is.' 'I think she is already gone out, but I'll go and make sure about it,'" and Madame Grospré opened the drawing-room door and began to call with all her might,—

"Cunegonde! Cunegonde."

The "first-class" cook came grumblingly, because they had disturbed her at her third luncheon; she muttered,—

"What do you want me for?"

"Cunegonde, yesterday morning when I begged you to look for Madame Valbrun to come to

breakfast — where did you find her? You were looking for her for a long time, — she was out of doors, no doubt. Answer straightforwardly and don't try to hide the truth from me."

"Why should you say all this to me, madame?"

"It is very important! Where was my cousin?"

"She was at her toilet."

"That'll do — that is quite enough."

The cook went off saying, "Stupid things, to disturb me to ask me such a thing as that."

The servant being gone, Madame Grospré threw herself into an easy chair, exclaiming,—

"Guide me, my dear Monfignon — what must I do? How shall I conduct myself towards my relative? I cannot, I simply cannot suffer scandalous intrigues to form under my eyes. I cannot, by my silence, seem to give my consent to them. Well, you don't answer — what are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking that had I known of this intrigue sooner I should have changed something in my quatrain — yes; wait! I think it is coming to me. I versify so easily."

"Can you not rewrite your quatrain later on?"

"Hush! not a word! don't stir. Yes, that is it. Listen,—

A stranger, with his donkey steed.

With his donkey, that is singular, I had the variant, and now it has escaped me."

"Madame Valbrun is coming in."

"With his donkey—"

"What, is she mounted on Martin's donkey?"

"Why no, that is my verse. Ah, I've got my variant again. Listen!

A stranger, with his donkey steed,
There was no way to change his mind,
Entered our walls, but now, indeed,
We know what he did come to find!

Hey? What do you think of that?"

"It is charming! There is no one like you for rewriting poetry thus!"

"Yes, I think that is well enough turned, as Piron says. I think that was in his 'Metromanie.'"

"Now, please, come back to my cousin—What must I do?"

"You must do nothing, you mustn't let her guess that you know that any connection exists between her and this Martin, you must keep silence as to all this. Madame Valbrun, not being forewarned, will be off her guard — we'll spy upon her, we'll watch her — trust in me for that. And when we have incontrovertible proofs of her intrigue with the intruder, then, by Jove, we'll explode the bomb and will laugh a little at the expense of this Parisian, who called this place 'a little town.'"

"That's it, Monfignon—oh, it is perfect. Then, I shall say nothing of what you have told me."

"No, keep a close mouth! except to your husband if you think it necessary —"

"No, no; M. Grospré is becoming a complete nullity, it is useless to make this confidence to him."

"Madame Valbrun must have returned from her walk in the fields. I'll be off. It's just as well that she should not suspect anything. Silence and secrecy."

Monfignon left Madame Grospré and hurried to the houses of all his acquaintances, to whom in every place, under the pledge of secrecy, he confided his discovery of the morning, adding each time a trifle more to the conversation which he asserted he had heard between M. Martin and the pretty widow.

For her part, Madame Grospré had not failed to do the same; so that before the end of the day the whole town knew that Madame Valbrun had been seen conversing mysteriously, under a great tree in an isolated spot, with the tenant of the house in the spinach. To this Phœbe had not failed to add that her cousin, under a very ingenious pretext, had found a way to obtain possession to a key of the door of her house. What had been her intention in so doing? that was very easy to guess, now it had been ascertained that this young woman was intimate with the gentleman of the donkey. What a subject of tittle-tattle, gossip and slander for all these ladies, who could not bear the Parisian because she had a more distinguished appearance than they.

Oh, calumny ! calumny. Basile was quite right and there are so many Baziles ! It is very sad to say it but society can be divided for the most part into two parts ; one of which is delighted to tell evil things, the other amused at hearing them.

CHAPTER X

A Counterfeiter and a Murderer. A Crow Perched on a Tree

Clémentine, on returning from her eventful walk, had at first had the intention of immediately seeking her cousin, Madame Grospré, to inform her of the meeting she had had; but, later on, the idea came to her to wait until M. Martin was again the subject of conversation, reserving until then the power she now possessed of giving denial to a great part of the gossip that was uttered in regard to him.

This day also was a Saturday, and precisely that on which the weekly gathering was held at the former contractor's. The evening had hardly begun, when people came hurrying in. It could be seen by the expression of their faces that the evening promised to be of unusual interest, that they were preparing themselves for something striking. The ladies exchanged significant glances among themselves; the men alone had almost their habitual manner. Then there were whisperings,—

"She is not here yet?"

"No, but she is coming."

"Did she say nothing to you at dinner?"

"She did not come down, under the pretence of a headache; she sent word that she would not dine."

"She'll have had something with this gentleman," said Monfignon, rubbing his hands.

"How malicious you are!"

"Monfignon has a biting tongue — he's as cutting as possible."

"But what if she should not come — on account of that headache."

"Oh, she will come — I have sent Cunegonde to carry her some tea she asked for. And she said that she was coming down."

"Did she ask for some tea? she must have indigestion," said M. Postulant. "It would be better for her to have some of my elixir."

"Are we not going to play?" cried M. Boulingrin.

"Oh, Madame Grospré, do sit my uncle down to play as soon as you can, that he may leave us in peace," said Mademoiselle Mignonette.

"Yes, you are right, I must get him to play piquet with my husband; as for that, they don't understand anything of what we were saying just now, I don't believe either of them knows what is going on about them."

"I told my uncle everything! but do you know what he answered me?"

"What did he answer you?"

"'Bring me my slippers, and don't meddle in other people's affairs.'"

"Fie! that was an answer worthy of my husband. Then, if one is not to busy one's self about other people's affairs, what is one to busy one's self about? when there is nothing to do at home."

"Who will open the conversation on the gentleman of the donkey?" demanded Madame de Beaurivage.

"Oh, that will be M. Monfignon," said Phœbe; "as is his right — did he not discover all?"

"That's right," said Madame Rifflard; "besides I still remember the courage he showed in going out alone that night, when we heard such a frightful noise."

"And armed with tongs!" said M. Dupétral laughing.

"It was much better to go out armed with tongs, than to stay in bed when danger threatened his country!"

"Who was it was talking in verse?" asked the poet advancing, "I think I heard something that rhymed —"

"We were saying, dear friend, that it was you who would lead to the interesting subject of conversation, you know?"

"Yes, yes, you may rely on me! I will lead up to it naturally and unobservably. But hush! silence! Here she is; be on your guard."

Madame Valbrun entered the drawing-room and bowed to each one with the amiable and gracious manner which was natural to her; but instead of

receiving in exchange the stiff and pretentious salutations usual to the company, she noticed on all the faces an ironical and mocking smile, which bordered on impertinence. In fact, there was not one of them, up to the sensible Phœbe, who did not twist her mouth as the latter said, with an expression which she tried to render mischievous,—

"Oh, are you here, cousin? I was uneasy about you. This headache which attacked you so suddenly—on returning from your walk, for you have been for a walk during the day—I fear lest it should last long and become dangerous!"

"I thank you, but a headache is not a malady. I am surprised that you should be uneasy, for it is not the first time I have had one."

"That's true, yes, that is true; now I remember—I had not paid any attention to it, but now I remember."

"Perhaps you walked in the sun, madame," said Madame Postulant, leaning forward in her chair with an expression of raillery, "and that is very bad."

"Frankly, the sun has not been warm enough this summer to do any great harm," answered Clémentine.

"You were perhaps seated in the shade and it is damp there," said Madame Rifflard, resting on each word that she pronounced to let every one understand that her words had a double meaning.

"There is something not on the surface in that!"

said Madame Valbrun to herself; then she guessed that they had seen her talking in the fields with M. Martin, and she congratulated herself on not having said a word of this meeting to Madame Grospré, being very curious to see how far the suppositions of the society would go, and promising to amuse herself at the expense of the wits of the neighborhood.

She answered Madame Rifflard, with a very innocent expression,—

"Do you really think it is dangerous to sit in the shade when one is very warm?"

"Yes, madame, undoubtedly that is my opinion — Why, as for that, I do not presume that you would go alone — to walk in the country!"

"Why should I not, madame? and what harm do you see in it?"

"Why a lady might meet unpleasant people, expose herself to insult, to rudeness perhaps."

"The draper's wife has been rudely accosted twice in going to pick strawberries! she herself told her husband so!" exclaimed Monfignon.

"Then," muttered Dupétral, "she should no longer sing,—

Away! away to the strawberry beds!"

"I had not heard any one say that you had any evil-doers in the neighborhood," answered the young widow, "and I walk about it without the slightest fear."

"People are not only assailed rudely by robbers," resumed the pharmacist's wife.

"No, certainly not," said Monfignon, "some individuals who are not robbers by occupation, are none the less dangerous."

"They are even more dangerous," added Phœbe, "because no one suspects them. When I say no one suspects them, I make a mistake, people do suspect them, and their eyes are opened to all their underhand ways."

This sentence seemed to give lively satisfaction to the company, and gave Clémentine a desire to laugh that she could with great difficulty restrain.

"Apropos of dangerous people," said the little poet jeeringly, "I had an encounter this morning. I was in luck today, I assure you, and I saw a number of things. I can say with Titus, 'My day is not lost!'"

"And whom did you meet, my dear friend?"

"The lady of the 'Mirliton,' whom our good Liroquet had already met. Without knowing her at all, I said to myself, 'That must be she.' You know, the lady who walked along singing that comic, but all too erotic song."

"Oh, the lady who was going to the house of the gentleman who owns the donkey?"

"The very same. I met her early this morning; she had a small parcel in her hand and was going towards the railway."

"She was, no doubt, coming from — Martin's."

"Certainly, and it is quite probable that she slept there. The parcel she was carrying may have held her night garments. She was tripping along almost as though she was dancing the cachuca — it was very funny."

"Was she again singing the 'Mirliton?'"

"I was too far off to hear. But very likely she was humming it, for she looked as if she was dancing as she walked."

"Good heavens," said Madame Rifflard, "who will deliver us from the vicinity of this man with the peaked hat? It is he who attracts these ugly people into the country. And it is very disagreeable for respectable women to be obliged to rub elbows with — hussies — to use a plain word."

"Patience, ladies, patience!" resumed Monfignon; "I have received new particulars from Paris — they are from some one who is very exactly informed, and knows everything of importance before the papers get hold of it."

"The devil he does," said Dupétral, "what! is he the prefect of police?"

"No, he is not the prefect of police; but without being on the police force one may know a very great deal."

"Have done now, Monfignon; what is your news from Paris?"

"That they are in search of a man who makes counterfeit money — four sous pieces, imitated with rare perfection and which, according to the infor-

mation which they have gathered — information which has been given to me only with the most scrupulous exactitude, the above-said counterfeiter must have come to hide in this part of the country under a false name, and in a lonely dwelling far from other habitations, where he continues to give himself secretly to his guilty industry."

"Why, good God!" cried Madame Grospré, "all this would seem to show that this counterfeiter is no other than that individual who lives in the house in the spinach!"

"By Jove! that's the idea that came to me also. There are so many things in common between this man and the criminal they are looking for."

"It is he, there isn't a doubt of it — it must be he! In the first place, he disguises himself, he hides himself under his beard and his hat. First proof!"

"Then," said Madame Postulant, "it is not natural that a man who is still young should sequestrate himself and avoid everybody when he lives in a pretty little town like ours."

"He must have very grave motives to conduct himself thus!"

"And these groundfloor shutters which he keeps constantly closed," said Madame Rifflard; "is it not thus that people shut themselves up who fear the notice of the police?"

"And then this name of Martin, which cannot be his own. Why, I'll wager this man is the counterfeiter they are in search of."

"Good Lord!" cried M. Liroquet, putting his hand in his pocket, "I received a four sous piece two days ago — have I still got it, I wonder? No, I gave it to my servant, who must have passed it. Why, if that piece was false, I shall be compromised. Who has any four sous pieces here?"

Every one fumbled in his pocket, but no one found himself in possession of the desired coin.

"It would seem as though he hasn't put any of them in circulation here," said M. Postulant.

"That is for prudential reasons," said Monfignon; "these people are careful not to scatter their spurious coin except at a distance from their place of making it. Why, this donkey he bought, it is quite probable that this animal deports the counterfeit money which this man sets in circulation far from here. If that isn't the reason, why, I ask you, should he have a donkey?"

"Oh, a sudden idea strikes me?" cried Madame Grospré; "that night they were so active in their pursuit of the donkey it is almost certain that the latter had some bags of counterfeit pieces on his back."

"That must have been the true motive of this nocturnal course," said Monfignon; "you see how when one looks into it a little, everything unites to enlighten us. 'Fiat lux!'"

"What I don't understand," said Dupétral, "is why a man who counterfeits money should make four sous pieces instead of making at least francs."

"You don't understand, young man, that the small coin is more easily placed and passed than large. And, then, who told us that this man confined himself to imitate those only?"

"Why, Madame Valbrun, we have not yet had your opinion as to this serious affair," resumed Monfignon, addressing himself to the pretty Parisian, who had listened with the greatest apparent indifference to the story of the counterfeiter; "and we are anxious to know if it accords with ours."

"Why, monsieur," answered Clémentine, assuming a mysterious expression, "I can give you something better than my opinion — I can impart to you the news that I have also received from Paris and which is at least as interesting as yours. It did not come to me from the prefect of police, but, as you very well said just now, without belonging to the police one may know a good deal."

The little poet seemed astonished, and all the company awaited with a lively curiosity what this lady was going to say. Clémentine threw her eyes over the circle that surrounded her, saw all the necks stretched and the ears pricked up, and after enjoying it at a glance, resumed, still with the greatest seriousness,—

"Lately, in Paris, in the Mouffetard neighborhood, a man, knowing that one of his friends had won three francs fifteen centimes at bezique during the evening, introduced himself into this friend's house, armed with a revolver, and there said to the

fortunate gamester, 'Give me your three francs fifteen centimes, or I will kill you.' The friend refusing to give that sum, the man fired his revolver and killed him. At the sound two neighbors came running — he killed them. As he went down he met the porter, he killed him; and in the street fired again at a ragpicker. Then he managed to escape. But they put all the police in pursuit of him, and at last they discovered that he had come to hide in this part of the country, that he lived in a house outside the town—and that he had bought a donkey, probably that he might escape on it when they should come to arrest him."

Towards the end of the young widow's recital, the faces grew longer. M. Monfignon's assumed an expression of vexation, for it was impossible for the company not to see that Madame Valbrun was making game of him. Madame Rifflard alone took the thing in earnest, and she cried,—

"Well, then, this Martin is not only a counterfeiter, he is also an assassin."

"Is he not, madame?" said Clémentine, smiling, "and if we look well into it perhaps we shall find he is something else also."

But the company were not at all of the same opinion. They saw they had been mystified and they held their tongues. Monfignon alone said after a moment,—

"I think it is useless for us to dwell on this subject. We shall see what comes later. Await events."

" Madame Valbrun is making fine fun of you," said Dupétral in the poet's ear.

" That is possible, but she had better take care! I shall have my turn."

Clémentine at first had not intended again to walk alone in the vicinity of M. Martin's dwelling, although the latter had so earnestly besought her to do so; she had said to herself that it would give this gentlemen the right to think she would be pleased to see him again, and though it certainly was the truth, or, to be more exact, because it was the truth, she did not wish it to be known to him. But after this evening, when all the company had tried to say sharp things about him, after the absurd history of the counterfeiter, the pretty widow said to herself,—

" Ah, they don't like it because I talk with this gentlemen, they say these horrible things about him to make me blush for having spoken to him. Well, as I wish to show these ladies and gentlemen how little I care for their foolish gossip, I shall take a walk to the big tree again, on which my hat was caught. I shall certainly meet M. Martin, and I shall talk again with him, if it only be to tease all these people, who see evil in the most simple actions."

In fact, on the day after her cousin's party Clémentine went out alone about one o'clock in the afternoon; this time, instead of taking her book, she took her embroidery, and she directed her steps

towards the dwelling of the gentleman with the peaked hat.

The young woman walked slowly along without looking behind her, and without suspecting that she was followed from afar by Monfignon, who for two days had stationed himself sentinel in front of the Grosprés' house, lunching from his hand in the street for fear of missing Madame Valbrun's departure.

Clémentine had hardly passed the house in the spinach when she heard steps quite near her, and soon a voice, which she immediately recognized, because that voice was sweet and sympathetic, said to her, almost in a whisper,—

"How fortunate I am, madame, since chance has led you this way again, I dared not hope for it, but I prayed heaven that you might not find more agreeable walks in another direction."

"As you say, monsieur, it was chance which— But no, monsieur, I cannot be false, I will be quite frank; I came this way because I thought I should meet you and because I wanted to talk again with you, that you might learn what new things they have said about you."

"Then, madame, if this was the motive to which I owe your presence, I thank the gossips who are so obliging as to occupy themselves with me."

"You thank them — but you don't know what frightful things they have said about you."

"So much the better, madame; so much the better; it will be the more amusing."

"The fact is, it was so horrible that it became comic."

"Will you not be so good as to let me know what I have done now?"

"But I don't like to talk standing up, and if you have time to listen to me, monsieur, we will go and seat ourselves on the bank of grass, where we sat the other day."

"If I have time? Oh, madame, those moments which I pass beside you are my happiest."

"It was not that you should say such things as these that I came here, monsieur."

"No, but you can't prevent my thinking them, and profiting by the occasion to say them to you."

"Come, let us sit down, monsieur."

"I am at your orders, madame."

Madame Valbrun and her new acquaintance had gained the big tree and seated themselves on the green bank at its feet. Then Clémentine told the bearded gentleman of her cousin's evening; she told him everything that had been said of him. The young man laughed heartily.

"So, I am a counterfeiter," he exclaimed, "and I make four sous pieces, do I? Why, really, when they were crediting me with this industry it seems to me that they might have let me go so far as to make two franc pieces."

"That is what a young man who was present, and who is not so stupid or malicious as the others, said. But this is what I answered them,"

The so-called Martin laughed still more as he listened to all the crimes this lady had placed to his account, then he resumed,—

"But whence comes this rabid desire to busy themselves with me?"

"It's because you don't busy yourself with them."

"And what was the meaning of that mocking expression that you noticed when they were speaking to you?"

"It was owing to the fact that they had learned, —I know not how, nor by whom, but they certainly had learned that I had talked with you."

"So I have compromised you, madame."

"Was it your fault that my hat blew off and that you brought it to me? Be fully persuaded that, far from bearing you a grudge for it, I am still grateful for the service you rendered me."

"It will be unfortunate if I should cause you to be bored in the slightest degree."

"Bored! quite to the contrary. I beg you to believe that all these stories procure me distractions which cause me to find the time less long; and they came just at the right moment, too, for I was beginning to be tired at my cousin Grospré's, and was thinking of returning to Paris."

"What, madame, you were already going to leave the country. Oh, please do not do so yet, this spot would become too lonely if I had no longer the hope of meeting you."

"Monsieur, in the first place I cannot take seriously what you say to me, we have met too seldom, I do not say as acquaintances, for to meet by chance and converse together twice is not to be acquainted. As I say, we have met too seldom for my absence from this country to cause you the slightest regret."

"Excuse me, madame, if I answer that you are in error; many meetings are not necessary, nor an acquaintance of old date, to make one's heart beat for a woman whom he is compelled to love. At least, that is how I understand love."

"You love very quickly, then."

"Yes, madame; it seems to me that one must please at once, if one is to please at all."

"And do you think that a woman also ought to love at first sight, without knowing if the one who takes her fancy is worthy of her esteem, her confidence, without knowing even what he is or what he does?"

The bearded gentleman smiled and was silent for a few moments, then he resumed,—

"I confess, madame, that my way of living here in the country may seem a little out of the usual."

"Oh, yes, monsieur! you may well believe that I do not share all the ideas of the people of this neighborhood, that I don't believe a word of the calumnies they utter against you — since, on the contrary, I have made fun of them."

"I thank you for it, madame."

"But I must, however, confess that your manner of living and of dressing is not at all that of the world. You have carefully avoided all contact with the notabilities of the country."

"M. Frémont knows me."

"Yes, but it seems that M. Frémont does not wish you to be acquainted with any beside himself, for he only laughed in the faces of those persons who asked him who you were. And then M. Frémont is nearly always at Paris and does not come to my cousin's."

"Then it is not allowable for any one to come to the country to enjoy a little solitude?"

"Solitude; but you are not solitary at all — if you avoid the natives, on the other hand, you have visitors who come by rail, among others a — lady who sings the air of 'Mirliton' as she walks to your house."

The young man, shouting with laughter, said,—

"Oh, that's Malvina; I recognize her by that; she can't be two minutes without singing."

"It seems she is very cheerful, this Madame Malvina; they say, too, that she looks like — good heavens, I don't know how to express it."

"She looks like a grisette."

"Oh, much worse than that. There are grisettes who are very pleasing — but your — lady, it seems she is of the risky kind."

"And who has given you so much information about poor Malvina?"

"It was M. Monfignon — it was he who met her and noticed it."

"Ah, the little gentleman who made such a pretty verse on me and my donkey. Decidedly, I shall have to correct the little man."

Here there was a great noise of leaves and creaking branches in the top of the tree, but the two persons who were talking beneath it paid no attention to that.

"Madame, pardon me if I weary you by my importunities, but, I beg of you, don't go yet, don't leave this town yet; for I feel that then I can no longer stay here, and all I came to do would be a failure."

"Monsieur, I was tired of being at my cousin's, but, thanks to the stories they forge on your account, I am no longer bored; I have, therefore, no motive for hastening my departure — but if I stay, you must not think I did so because you begged me."

"Oh, no, madame, I swear to you I won't think so."

"Besides, I repeat to you that I shan't take all you say seriously. You also seek distractions — as is quite natural."

"Oh, no, madame, it was not for that I rented this lonely house, it was that I might work more uninterruptedly than I could in Paris, where I had many distractions."

"It seems to me, monsieur, that when one comes

to live in the country to work one need not receive there ladies who are always singing."

"And what if I cannot work without that dame?"

"Oh, that is a little too much! Did you not keep her here all night? did she not sleep here?"

"Did she sleep here? Malvina? why the idea. No, madame, I assure you she has never slept here. Who has dared to say that?"

"Why it was M. Monfignon; he saw the dame leaving your house very early in the morning, with a parcel of clothing under her arm."

"Why, what an infamous liar this gentleman is. I shall really have to flog him and tie him to my donkey's tail. Oh, I swear to you—"

The young man with the beard was here interrupted by something very heavy which fell from a high branch of a tree, brushed his shoulders, and struck on the grass behind him and Madame Valbrun. The latter uttered an exclamation at the sound of this sudden fall; she turned round, as did her neighbor, to see what had just missed crushing both of them, and recognized the little poet, who formed a kind of ball on the ground because he had gathered himself into a ball in falling, but who carried his hand to his face, saying,—

"Confound it! I have broken my nose and torn one of my ears, to say nothing of my paletot, which I have also torn."

A few words will be sufficient to explain what

had happened to this gentleman; on seeing the pretty Parisian turn her steps towards the house in the spinach he had said,—

"The man with the donkey will see her, he will join her, and they will probably go and chat again under the big tree where they sat the other day; but, then, how can I get near them without being seen at a distance? and, if I cannot approach the tree, how can I hear what they say?"

Suddenly an idea came to him; immediately making a circuit he set off running with all his might, in order to reach the big tree before Madame Valbrun, and without her noticing it. When there, he recalled the gymnastic lessons of his youth, he put his arms around the tree, and climbed it with sufficient agility. Then he chose a strong branch, and one that was thickly covered with foliage, just above the bank, and said to himself,—

"Now they are coming to chat under me; the sounds will rise, and I shall hear all without being seen. It must be confessed that I have thought of a charming expedient, and that I'm a very witty, knowing fellow."

But our knowing fellow had soon perceived that one is not as much at one's ease on the branch of a tree as in an easy chair. He had sometimes tried to change his position a little; then when the young man with the peaked hat had spoken of correcting him, he could not prevent a movement of fear, which had made the branches creak; it was worse

when the gentleman swore that he would tie him to his donkey's tail, then, forgetting the uncertainty of his seat, he had jumped on his branch, lost his equilibrium, and, in fact, as we have seen, had fallen almost on M. Martin's shoulders.

"What is this we have here?" said the young man, looking at this gentleman who had dropped, if not from the skies, at least from the way which leads there.

"That!" answered Clémentine, who had already recovered from her fright, and could not help laughing at the piteous face which M. Monfignon was making as he felt his wounded nose and his grazed ear, "That is M. Monfignon!"

"The one we were speaking of just now?"

"Precisely!"

"Hang it, monsieur, you have a singular manner of presenting yourself before, no behind, people. Do you not realize that you might have injured madame severely?"

"Do you suppose I did it on purpose, for instance? I might have killed myself also, and certainly that was not my intention."

"But, in fact, monsieur, what were you doing up in this tree? for that is where you fell from."

"Monsieur, I had gone up in this walnut tree to pick some walnuts."

"You are joking — they are not nearly ripe."

"I like them so, when they are small. 'Twas to make some walnut broth, a stomachic liqueur."

"What do you think of that, madame," said M. Martin addressing Clémentine. The latter answered smiling,—

"I think it is not necessary to try to solve this mystery. If, as is presumable, monsieur was perched on that tree from curiosity, and to listen to our conversation, I think he has been sufficiently punished for his shameful action, and I hope it will serve as a lesson to him."

Monfignon, who had managed to pick himself up, wiped the mould off his clothes as he said,—

"What, madame, you can believe it was curiosity which led me; oh, no, you are in error, I assure you. Oh, my nose pains me badly."

"Monsieur," said the bearded young man in a rather grave tone, "I don't know whether it was curiosity or some other motive which caused you to perch in this tree; but what I do know is, that since I have lived in this country you have constantly occupied yourself with me. There are no calumnies or lies that you have not spread abroad on my account; you have even made a verse on me, in which you say you can prevent me, but the verse does not say from what. It is time this should end, monsieur, and I swear to you that the first false news that you tell about me, I'll tie you to my donkey's tail, and then I'll make him trot through your little town as fast as on that night you were so fearfully frightened, and when my friends and I had the pleasure of jumping over you."

Monfignon became red, yellow, greenish; he stammered,—

"Monsieur, these things you say, you can't mean them seriously — it's only a joke, isn't it?"

"No, monsieur, I speak seriously; but if instead of that flight at my donkey's tail, you desire to meet me with the sword or pistol, why, I am your man and will give you every satisfaction. Answer, monsieur, which would you prefer?"

This time Monfignon became as pale as a ghost; he pulled his hat down over his eyes and departed precipitately, saying,—

"No, monsieur, never! — a duel, it is against my principles! for shame! I have a horror of duels. I fight one — I should like to see myself!"

Monfignon had gone. After laughing at his, "I should like to see myself," which would have done honor to "Father Sournois," Clementine offered her hand to her new acquaintance, saying,—

"Good-by, monsieur, we are going to furnish material for all the tongues of the neighborhood."

"Good-by, did you say, madame? oh, no, not good-by, but au revoir, is it not?"

"Well, yes, if you wish it so — au revoir."

CHAPTER XI

A Disappointed Group

"This young man seems immensely infatuated, and he is really quite rash," said the young widow to herself as she returned to her cousin's house; "but then he is very agreeable — Good heavens! what if I were to fall in love with him? oh, what an idea! with one who does not wish to say what he is, nor what he does. I think, however, he was going to explain himself on the subject of this — Malvina when that ugly little man fell almost on top of us."

Then, while continuing to give herself up to her thoughts, which now gravitated around the same object, Clémentine said to herself again, "After all, I married M. Valbrun because he was a very virtuous young man, quite settled, who blushed whenever he looked at me, and, God knows, I have not had occasion to congratulate myself upon my choice; the sheep turned into a wolf. This very original young man may become quite virtuous when he marries — as virtuous as a man can be — for, in fact, one must not ask what is impossible!"

Madame Grospré wore her mocking smile as she saw her cousin returning from her walk; but she

did not address the slightest question to her, because, she said to herself, "Monfignon will have followed her, and from him this evening at Madame Rifflard's we shall learn all that has passed; the more so since my Parisian does not go to Madame Rifflard's, where, in consequence, we can talk quite at our ease."

It was, in fact, the widow of four husbands' evening. Madame Valbrun did not go there, because the gossip at that house was even more indigestible than that at the Grosprés'. They had such intrepid speakers there, that in the evening they had to take their turn to speak.

Madame Rifflard exclaimed, as she saw Phœbe, "Well, what is there new? did she go out today?"

"Yes, she went out alone during the day; she stayed out even longer than usual, and when she came in appeared greatly agitated."

"That is easily understood! she had probably been talking with her lover."

"We shall know all that passed presently, for Monfignon was on the watch — he swore he would revenge himself on her for making game of him the other evening when he asked for her opinion. I am quite persuaded that he will tell us this evening what the Parisian did this morning."

"Then I hope he'll soon be here. Dear Monfignon, he is such an acquisition to our society!"

"It seems to me he is late."

"Yes, it is past eight."

"Oh, he will come, he never fails; it's because he wishes us to long for him, he's vain!"

"He must know that we want to see him especially this evening."

"Oh there's a ring; that is surely he."

All eyes were turned towards the door of the drawing-room and they saw — M. Liroquet!

The bachelor was met by sulky faces, so greatly were they vexed that their dear poet had not yet come. Besides, the old gentleman had fallen a good deal from the ladies' grace since they knew that he had gone out in the night in a cap and apron belonging to his maid.

Half an hour rolled by again, and Monfignon did not come. Astonishment was at its height; presently they began to be uneasy as well.

"He must be ill, or he would have come this evening; something must have happened to him," cried Madame Rifflard, "I'll send my porter to him."

But just as the lady was getting ready to give her orders, the door of the drawing-room opened and the servant announced, "M. Monfignon!"

The little man appeared; but if he had not been announced no one would have recognized him; in the first place he looked as if he had a helmet on. His whole head was bandaged in black silk, and over that a bandage of the same material was placed across his nose in such a way as to cut his face in half, and, lastly, he walked painfully, hob-

bling a little. A general cry re-echoed: "Good God! Monfignon, what is the matter with you?— What has happened to you?—Who put you in such a state as that?—Have you been fighting?— Yes, there is no longer any doubt of it—he must have fought a duel with that—Martin—It was that suspicious character who attacked him—treacherously, no doubt."

"Why, he's not wounded in the back!" said Dupétral.

"Messieurs," cried Madame Rifflard, taking an antique pose, "I assert that we must have done with that brigand. Let us all go and complain to the mayor. Let us carry our poor friend with us, for he seems as if he could hardly walk!"

Several persons had already begun to rise, when Monfignon, who during all this time had been gently raising the bandage that was on his nose to try to wipe that organ, exclaimed in an angry tone,—

"What are you going to do; I beg of you not to disturb yourselves. What do you want to go to the mayor for? What do you want to do there? What do you want to say to him? Nothing at all, for you know nothing. Have I complained? Have I told you that M. Martin hurt me? I never told you so. I have not the very slightest complaint to formulate against that gentleman—I would say even more, that I think it very unconventional for you to speak of him as a brigand. Why should

you describe him as a brigand? On what grounds do you found this accusation? And if this gentleman should hear you did so, as very likely he may, if he should issue a complaint against you? if he should bring an action against you for calumny and defamation? Hey, what would you say then? You would pay the expenses and the fine — and serve you right, too — you would deserve it!"

Everybody looked at him in surprise, they could hardly believe their ears. The little poet was now defending the man of the donkey, whom formerly he had been the first to attack. But the gentleman's threats had had their effect. The tone in which he had sworn to Monfignon that he would fasten him to his donkey's tail, unless that worthy preferred to fight a duel with him, had produced upon the poet such an impression that he had returned home very much indisposed, quite in a condition, in fact, to profit from his rose-haws.

"My dear Monfignon," said Madame Rifflard at length, "you astonish us very greatly. If I have described this stranger as a brigand it was not until I had heard the accusations you brought against him — you have described him as a counterfeiter."

"Me! never! that isn't so; I never said that."

"Everybody here heard you, the same as I did."

"Everybody heard wrong, then! I said 'There's an individual in Paris who's putting in circulation false four sous pieces' — that had not the slightest connection with M. Martin."

"But at least, M. Monfignon," said Phœbe, rendered impatient by the poet's continual denials, "you cannot deny that you accused this man of trying to pillage and set fire to the town on the night that you got up and ran through the streets shouting, 'Help! to arms!'"

"Me, madame! oh, I did that for a joke; I was playing a farce, and you took it so seriously — it amused me very much!"

"And when the donkey jumped over your body as you were lying flat on your face?"

"That was agreed on."

"Agreed on with the donkey?"

"No, with these young men."

"In fact, monsieur," resumed the Widow Rifflard, "you will not contradict the fact that two days ago you informed us that you had seen Madame Valbrun and this M. Martin talking under a tree? that you heard them make very loving speeches, which indicated that they were on the most intimate terms?"

Monfignon was embarrassed; he wanted to scratch his nose, but he could only scratch the bandage; finally, he muttered,—

"I saw Madame Valbrun? — under a tree? Allow me — wait a bit! Yes, I remember now, I thought it was the pretty widow, but I was mistaken. I have since learned that it was another lady from Paris who was talking with that gentleman."

"But today, monsieur, today," cried Phœbe, getting excited, "you were watching my cousin; she went out, and you surely must know where she went to and whom she met?"

"Me, madame, I was watching your cousin! And for what do you take me, if you please, to believe that I spend my time in watching these people? Would not that be a pretty occupation for a literary man? Thank God! I have something else in my head."

"Why, you were in the street — opposite my door all the morning, stuck in an embrasure. What were you doing there, then?"

"I was making verses, madame; I make them wherever I happen to be — in the street as elsewhere."

Everybody was silent; they were astounded by Monfignon's answers. However, after a few moments, M. Postulant said to him,—

"But what's the matter with your head and face, that you cover it thus with taffetas?"

"I fell — yes, I slipped on my staircase. I missed a step — then two — then four; my head is very bad, and I've broken my nose."

"The devil you have! take some of my elixir."

"It made me quite ill — so much so that — I'll go home and go to bed. Yes, I must get home as fast as I can."

The little man bowed to the company and hastily left. They were all greatly disappointed; they had

expected some gossip and some spicy reports as to Madame Valbrun's walk; and instead of that they had heard Monfignon defend M. Martin, and disown the greater part of the things he had said against him.

"All that is not natural," said Madame Grospré; "he must have cracked his brain in falling, and he no longer remembers all he has said."

"I have another idea," said Dupétral.

"Let us hear this other idea."

"It is that M. Martin having learned, by some chance, of all the gossiping that Monfignon has done about him, he has administered a sound drubbing, which has put our friend in the state in which you see him, and has probably promised him a second if he begins his gossip again."

"Yes, yes, it must be that," came from all sides. "Monfignon has had a drubbing."

And some of them did not fail to add, "And a good thing, too!"

CHAPTER XII

A Woman Riding Crupper. A Farewell Letter

The better part of a week had elapsed. Monfignon was still troubled with his stomach, although he had absorbed two bottles of M. Postulant's excellent elixir. He went out much less of an evening, for now he received rather a cold welcome, because he took his hat and escaped whenever they spoke of M. Martin.

The gossips of the neighborhood were lost in conjectures. The gatherings were much less amusing, since they knew nothing more that was new as to the tenant of the house in the spinach.

Madame Valbrun went to walk alone every day, but no one followed her; the state in which we have seen Monfignon frightened the curious, for they were still persuaded that he had been beaten by M. Martin.

Only the pretty Parisian kept her good-humor, her amiability; she had seemed even more cheerful for some time past, a smile was almost continually upon her lips; in fact, in her whole person they saw that happy, satisfied expression which indicates contentment of mind.

This was because Clémentine had given herself up to the pleasure of loving, a pleasure so sweet at its inception, and when it is shared. Every day she saw the young man with the peaked hat, and every day, when with her, he was more amiable, more loving, more eager, and when Clémentine said to him,—

" But, in fact, monsieur, who are you ? What is your occupation ? What relations have you with that woman who sang the tune of ' Mirliton ' as she walked to your house ? "

Then the so-called Martin answered her, in a more affirmative tone,—

" Please, madame, have patience for a few days more ; I will explain all that very easily, you will see that I am not unworthy of your esteem, and that if my conduct in this country is rather peculiar, at least there is nothing guilty in it."

Madame Valbrun allowed herself to be persuaded, for as has already been said two or three hundred times — and this will make once more — one easily believes what one wishes to.

Madame Grospré often had a desire to question her cousin ; in fact, one morning she could no longer restrain herself and said,—

" People tell me, my dearest, that they have seen you talking several times with this M. Martin, the man of the donkey — is it true ? "

" Yes, cousin ; they have not deceived you; I have made the acquaintance of the gentleman ; he

is very agreeable and I like to talk with him very much."

"What, cousin! are you not afraid of compromising yourself by talking to this — individual?"

"No, really, for that individual, as you are pleased to call him, has very good manners, a perfect tone, wit, education, and is accustomed to good society."

"You astonish me, you surprise me! his dress, however, is not that of a man of the world."

"Good gracious, cousin! his dress, which shocks you so much, would not be noticed in Paris; it is rather eccentric, in fact, but artists often attire themselves thus."

"This gentleman is an artist, then?"

"He did not tell me so, but I presume he is."

"Then he must be an actor. Those people always want to make themselves conspicuous — to be singular. At what theatre does he play?"

Madame Valbrun shrugged her shoulders and departed, answering,—

"I know nothing further, cousin."

Phœbe said to herself, "My cousin is in love with this comedian. She is mad! she will do something foolish yet, she is already compromised. Now, I must go and tell every one what I have learned."

Upon the day following this conversation, the weather being magnificent, a great part of Grospré's company met at noon with the intention of

going to see a fête in a small neighboring village. Madame Valbrun had consented to be of the party, and the little poet, who had at last recovered from his indisposition, was there also.

The party were leaving the street in which the ex-contractor lived, when suddenly they saw M. Postulant running towards them, for he had been obliged to go to a patient's and had said to his wife,—

"Go along, I will join you presently."

The pharmacist was all in a perspiration, and his wife said to him,—

"Why have you put yourself in such a perspiration? You could have caught up to us later on."

"Why, I ran because I saw something so funny. He will pass by here, it is on his way as he comes from the station. He stopped to talk with M. Frémont, and, but for that, he'd have already passed."

"Why, whom do you mean?"

"Who's going to pass?"

"M. Martin on his donkey."

"And is that what seems so funny to you? Was that what you wanted us to stop for?"

"Who is talking about M. Martin now? that was not me," cried Monfignon; "I don't want you to put anything on my back, I warn you!"

"That's good, Monfignon; by Jove, here you are as pale as curds, merely because this man is mentioned."

"Pale! I am not pale — why do you say I'm

pale? I must be very red, on the contrary, for my cheeks are burning."

"See here, M. Postulant, what induced you to stop us? and what is there to see that is so curious in M. Martin riding on his donkey?"

"Oh, if it was he alone on his steed, of course, it would not be worth while to wait — but he is not alone — there is some one on the crupper — some one whom no doubt he has been to meet at the railway station."

"What, he has some one on the crupper?"

"Yes, and that some one is a woman."

"A woman!"

"A woman riding crupper on a donkey, behind M. Martin!"

"Yes, yes, and a young woman, as far as I could guess, for she had a veil over her bonnet."

"Pay attention to the fact that it is not I who have said that," cried Monfignon; "this news is totally strange to me, and perhaps apocryphal."

"Apocryphal, hang it! you can all of you see whether I'm lying or not. Wait, I hear him coming, he's putting his donkey at the gallop — he'll pass us in a minute — look out, ladies."

The party were then standing on a little open space into which several roads ran. Presently, coming from one of them, they saw M. Martin on his donkey and in fact a woman was seated on the crupper behind him. This woman, whose dress was rather coquettish, wore a straw bonnet on her

M. Martin pressed his mount still faster, so that he passed like a streak before the party.

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY ERNEST FUHR.

VINS ET SPIRITUEUX

head and a green veil tied over her face, but her two arms encircled the body of her squire, and seemed to squeeze him so tightly that she followed all his movements.

On seeing everybody on the square M. Martin pressed his mount still faster, so that he passed like a streak before the party, without his lady having stirred on the crupper.

Madame Valbrun had seen all that, and she blushed, then she became very pale ; for this time she had seen with her own eyes, as did the others, and she was sure it was not a lie.

"Well, now!" cried M. Postulant, "was I lying? Wasn't that well worth seeing?"

"Oh, yes, yes, it was very amusing."

"What kind of woman would ride crupper on a donkey — one can easily guess," said Madame Rifflard.

"At any rate she stuck pretty tight to him!" said Dupétral. "What assurance! She and her squire were one!"

"That's true," said M. Liroquet, "she looked as if she was glued to him."

"From which I conclude," resumed the pharmacist, "that she must be a rider from the circus. What do you think, Monfignon?"

"I think nothing, I say nothing, I saw nothing."

"What? You haven't seen M. Martin pass on his donkey with a woman on the crupper behind him and her arms around his body?"

"All that passed so quickly before me, that I could distinguish nothing. That is my opinion."

Madame Valbrun said nothing, she did her best to hide that she was suffering. All the ladies looked at her with an ironical expression, and seemed to be overjoyed at the change which had taken place in her face.

They resumed their walk to go to the fête in the neighboring village; but at the end of five minutes Madame Valbrun said to Phœbe,—

"Cousin, I am very sorry to be unable to accompany you further, but I feel indisposed — so much so that I must not continue this walk."

"What, you are ill, my dear cousin? Why this has come on you very suddenly."

"Yes, it is the heat. I will go in and lie down."

"Would you like some one to go back with you?"

"Shall I venture to offer you my arm, madame?" said big Dupétral.

"Thank you, monsieur; I don't wish anyone to be put out for me, that would vex me; besides, we are still very near my cousin's. Good-by, then, and I wish you a very pleasant time."

Clémentine bowed to the company and then returned to the house of Grospré.

"We know what made her ill!" exclaimed Madame Rifflard as soon as the young widow had gone, "it was spite, anger at seeing her — Martin bringing that hussy home on his crupper!"

"Certainly, that must have been it," said Phœbe in her turn, "but for a well-bred woman like her to take a fancy for a strolling player like that, it's unworthy."

"Who called M. Martin a strolling player? I declare it was not I," exclaimed Monfignon, "and, besides, I don't believe he is one!"

"And even though he be," said Dupétral, "this old name of strolling player was good in the times of wandering troups, like those which Scarron depicts for us in his 'Roman Comique.' Today, actors are men like any others; they are educated, well-mannered, often witty, nearly always cheerful, and their society is sought after as preferable to that of many of the fools who have got rich and who think themselves somebodies because they have money."

"Hit! That's for Grospré," said the pharmacist under his breath.

"Good, that's a hit for him," said the ex-contractor looking at Liroquet.

"That was meant for Postulant!" muttered M. Breillet.

And each one sent the ball on to the next.

The village fête kept the party late, and they did not return to the town till evening.

"How is my fair cousin?" asked Madame Grospré mockingly of her cook; "has her malady progressed?"

"I do not know, madame, if your cousin has

progressed," answered the "first-class" cook, with her customary ill-humored expression; "but I do know that she must be far from here if she is still going."

"What do you mean by that, Cunegonde?"

"It is quite simple! your Parisian, when she came in, immediately packed her trunks and valises, sent them all to the station by the deaf old gardener, and left by the four o'clock train."

"Gone! my cousin gone! without telling me — without saying good-by! that's too much of a good thing!"

"But she left you a bit of a note here."

"Give it to me!" and Phœbe hastened to read the missive.

My Dear Cousin: — Excuse my abrupt departure, but a sudden affair and the need of caring for my health calls me to Paris. Receive my regrets, with many thanks for your hospitality. Will you kindly present my compliments to your husband. I count on sending you news of myself constantly.

Yours affectionately,

Clémentine Valbrun.

"She's laid down her arms," exclaimed Madame Grospré, going immediately to show this letter to her husband, who answered her,—

"I have invited Boulingrin to dinner tomorrow; he owes me my revenge at piquet."

The news of the Parisian's abrupt departure was the subject of conversation the next day throughout the whole town.

"It was anger which took her away," said Madame Rifflard.

"Jealousy!" said Madame Postulant.

"Spite," said Madame Breillet.

"Despair!" said Mademoiselle Mignonette.

"Why no," said Monfignon, "she went by the railway."

Five days later a new event occurred in the little town; the tenant of the house in the spinach, the man of the donkey, M. Martin, in fact, departed also. He returned his keys to the grocer Girard, and told him he could take possession of the house, as he did not contemplate returning.

"That proves their connivance," said Madame Rifflard; "madame left first, and the other decamped almost on her heels. How crafty these people are."

"Oh, my poor cousin!" cried Phœbe, "will she be so foolish as to see this actor Martin in Paris?"

"Notice, if you please," said Monfignon, "that I do not call him an actor, and that I think the expression very risky."

Three weeks had rolled by, and in the small town they were beginning to talk a little less of the pretty Parisian and of M. Martin, when the Grospré couple received a letter containing an announcement of a marriage, which read thus,—

Madame Clémentine Darbelle, the Widow Valbrun, has the honor of announcing to you her marriage to Monsieur Stéphane Didier, historical painter.

Then on the inside sheet,—

Monsieur Alexandre Didier, consulting advocate, has the honor to announce to you the marriage of his son Stéphane Didier with Madame Clémentine Darbelle, widow of Valbrun.

"Ah, my cousin is remarried! Good heavens! this is very sudden!" cried Phœbe. "But who is this M. Stéphane Didier, painter, whom she has married? She never spoke of this gentleman when she was here! she never even pronounced his name before me!"

And Madame Grospré ran with the letter to all her acquaintances and inquired if they knew by reputation the painter whom her cousin had recently married.

"Stéphane Didier!" cried Dupétral, "why he is one of our greatest painters, one of those who give the greatest promise; he has just finished an admirable picture, they say, which had been ordered of him by the government."

"Yes," said M. Postulant, "I have often seen that name in the journals and always accompanied by praise."

"Stéphane Didier!" said Monfignon in his turn, "oh, I know him well—when I say know him, I mean I have often heard speak of him."

"It seems," cried Madame Rifflard, laughing, "that this amiable Martin is entirely forgotten. Ha! ha! I'm pleased at that, for I detested that pointed hat, I had a horror of it."

And as M. Frémont had come from Paris and

was present at the gathering where these remarks were made, Madame Grospré addressed him, saying, in a mocking tone,—

"Well, and what of your friend, the original in beard and blouse — what does he say to this marriage?"

"Who's that?"

"Why, your friend Martin, the man of the donkey?"

"Oh, my friend who lived in the house in the spinach?"

"Exactly, and who had a donkey! what does he say to Madame Valbrun's marriage?"

"He is delighted, transported, for he is now the happiest of men."

"How is that?"

"Why, he has married the woman he adores."

"Oh, is he married, on his side?"

"On the same side as your cousin."

"And whom has he married, then?"

"Why, you know very well, since you received a letter of announcement."

"What do you mean to tell us, monsieur?"

"A very simple thing: which is, that Stéphane Didier and the so-called Martin are one and the same person. As he had been leading a rather dissipated life in Paris, and was incessantly surrounded by a crowd of importunate people, he got me to rent a country house for him, in order that he might live alone and give himself entirely up

to work, in order to finish a fine picture which had been ordered of him ; what is more, he had sworn to his father to preserve the strictest incognito, and not to return to Paris till his picture was finished."

Everybody was abashed. But the Widow Rifflard, who would never be beaten, cried,—

"You say this gentleman wanted to live alone, but he always had young men with him."

"An articled pupil and a pupil ; a painter needs assistance on a thousand occasions."

"And this damsel who was going to see him, singing the tune of 'Mirliton ?"

"That was a model ; she posed for his picture. A painter cannot get on without his model."

"But this other woman, that he was carrying on his donkey's crupper — was that also a model ?"

"Oh, no, that — why, that was really his mannikin, that he had had sent from Paris, because it was indispensable to him. They laughed heartily at the railroad when they put his mannikin behind him on his donkey."

"That was a mannikin," exclaimed Monfignon, "well, I would have wagered on it! Did ever woman hold so closely to her squire's back as that did ? it was a mannikin — that was easily seen."

This time Madame Rifflard found nothing more to say, and the whole company was confounded.

"By the way, M. Monfignon," resumed M. Frémont, addressing the poet, "My friend Stéphane, knowing that for some time past you have under-

taken his defence when anything was said against him, has charged me to offer you his donkey as an expression of his profound esteem for your talent."

"I accept it, monsieur," cried Monfignon, "I accept it with pride, even, since it has belonged to M. Stéphane Didier. I shall not say with M. Prudhomme,—

This donkey is the finest day of my life,

but I shall make a variant to that well-known verse, and I shall say,—

The present of a great painter is a benefaction from the gods!"

And now, Monsieur or Madame Reader, have you guessed in which little town all this took place?

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